

Lannie Doll's Collection

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Lannie Doll and the Lying Lover

“Hey, babe, what’s with the new costume? I thought you were going to be a fairy?” Mark asked as he took the drink Lannie handed him.

“You know me, always changing my mind at the last minute. Do you like it?” Lannie pulled at her dress and let her boyfriend examine her new outfit. She wore a pink foam dress with poofy sleeves and skirt. White tights, Mary Jane shoes, and a big white bow helped complete her costume, as did a colorful and large yellow lollipop.

“Oh, and check this out!” Lannie turned around to reveal a large silver key. “Go ahead, turn it,” she goaded, almost pressing the key into his body.

Cautiously, Mark reached forward and turned the key, making clicks sound from inside Lannie’s back. When he let go, the key began to turn and Lannie spun around.

“Hello, I’m Lannie-Doll. I want to be your friend!” She said in a semi-mechanical voice. “Would you like to play sex?”

One of Mark's friends spit out his drink. Mark would have done the same, had he been drinking at the time. The key wound down and Lannie shook her head.

"Wow. What was that? It was like I – Hey!"

Mark grabbed Lannie's shoulders and turned her key, this time several turns further.

The wind-up doll turned around once again. "Why, Marky, you're my best friend! Let's go play in my room!" She grabbed his hand and skipped up the stairs. The partygoers hooted and howled. Mark wore a huge grin. And why shouldn't he; he had a beautiful sex doll. Until Lannie's key wound down.

"Mark, what are – Ahhh!"

He barely wasted time to turn her key, not letting her have a moment to fight him or stop being his toy.

"What would you like to play, Marky! I would like to play tea party!" Lannie said as they entered an empty room. The door was barely closed before he shoved the doll against the wall and began to kiss her along her neck. He never paid attention to the room around him.

"Why, Marky!" Lannie Doll yelled.

Mark worked his way down her body and slid the doll's tights down her legs. He began to penetrate her, but there was a problem. "What the?" Mark looked under Lannie's skirt to find – nothing. Nothing that a working girl should have. Confused, he looked up to Lannie, who was not wearing her doll face. In fact, she was very, very mad.

"But, Marky," she said in a baby doll voice, "I wanted to play Tea Party."

He jumped away from Lannie, who matter-of-factly pulled her tights back up. Her key was still turning. Mark recovered his wits and tried to get around to Lannie's back, but she ducked and got behind him. He never had time to turn before the key jabbed into his back.

“Now, don’t worry, Marky, this doesn’t hurt at all.” She began to turn his key, causing clicking noises to come from within Mark’s body. Lannie was right – it didn’t hurt. “Now, Marky,” she said, leaving his side to sit down in a small chair, “let’s play tea party.”

His key didn’t turn, but he obeyed anyway and he sat in the chair opposite Lannie. The room, he finally saw, was painted pink with fairies and flowers on the walls. Everything was decorated for a little girl. Lannie poured tea for herself and Marky.

“Now, Marky, someone told me that you said something very mean about me. Is that true?”

“Of course not, Lannie. You’re my girlfriend. I could never say anything bad about you.” Marky’s key turned suddenly, and his shirt changed into a pink dress with poofy sleeves.

“Why did you lie to me, Marky? Don’t you love me? I love you.”

“I’m not lying, Lannie!” Mark’s face gained feminine features and rosy cheeks, his hair lengthened and a pretty bow appeared on his head.

“Marky! Stop lying! Lying is bad. What mean things did you say about me?”

“I said that you, uh, were just like a doll. That I could wind you up and you would have sex with me.”

Lannie dropped her baby doll voice, “Is that what you really think about me? That I’m your love toy?”

“No! Of course not.” Mark’s voice now sounded like Lannie’s used to, and hollow metallic. His legs, too, became like hers. “Please, baby, stop this.” Lannie walked over to Mark and knelt in front of him.

“Do you think that about her? That...that Kelly girl? Or is she the one that you want to spend your life with?”

“Lannie. I – I’m sorry. She was just so different. I couldn’t –”

“I would not finish that sentence if I were you, Mark.” Lannie said, wiping away an undeserved tear.

“Damn it.”

“Please, just fix this. We can go our separate ways. We never have to . . .”

Lannie shook her head. “We never will see each other again, Mark. And I’m not doing this for me. I’m doing this for the other girl and for any other girl you might have betrayed. Because I guarantee that you will not betray this little girl.” She leaned in and gave Mark one last kiss. Then his key began to turn again. He finished whatever other changes needed to be made and watched Lannie walk out of the room.

“OK, Mommy! I’ll be right there!” A little girl, dressed like Alice and with an overflowing Halloween bag, bounded into her room. She took a step back quickly, though, when she saw a pink wind-up toy sitting in her tea chair. She overcame her surprise quickly and picked up the doll and wound her key.

“Hello, my name is Mary! What is your name?”

“I’m Valerie.”

“Valerie’s such a pretty name. What would you like to play?”

The girl’s eyes lit up and she ran out of the room. “Mommy! Lookit! This is so cool!”

Lannie Doll and the Cheating Fool

Lannie stood at a stranger's doorway on a quiet suburban street while wearing an odd costume on this Halloween night: a pink, puffy baby doll dress and white tights. A white bow topped her brunette hair, and a foot and half long stuffed key stuck out from her back. She completed the ensemble with a large yellow lollipop.

The house was quiet, and Lannie enjoyed breaking the silence with three pounding door knocks. She stepped back and put upon the sweetest face she could muster while flicking a switch in her back that began her key spinning. Her movements sharpened and she soon was frozen rigid with a blank, happy stare on her face. Somewhere in her mind, Lannie was a little turned on by the charade of it all.

The woman who greeted her was a youthful twenty-something, dressed in a sultry and unoriginal school girl costume. Trussed up with pink bows on her knee high stockings and tiny ribbons in her hair, she tried too hard to act sexy. But that act was broken when she realized it was Lannie, not her lover, at the door.

"Hi!" Lannie said in a chipper voice. "Marky sent me over to keep you company until he can come!" Lannie Doll skipped forward in a strange, mechanical way, trying to get into the house. The woman, however, stepped in front of Lannie and blocked her passage.

"Um, who are you?"

"I am Lannie Doll! Who are you?"

"Did – did you say Lannie Doll?"

“Uh-huh!” The doll pipped, turning so the woman could see the winding key in her back. Lannie could control the key just like another arm, and forced it to slow down. “Ohh, nooooo,” she said, her body locking up as if she really were a mechanical toy. This part was just a bit dangerous, because with her key and switch configured as they were, Lannie really couldn’t move until she was wound back up. But the woman looked strangely at Lannie, and was just as frozen as the doll.

After a frightening moment, she stepped out of her house and turned Lannie’s key twice, which was more than enough for the doll to resume her chipper charade. “Thank you so much, owner.” She grabbed the woman by her hand, “Come, let’s go inside to play!” Lannie skipped and yanked her ‘owner’ behind her.

“Wait, so you’re Mark’s doll?” The woman said, pulling her hand back and stopping. Lannie turned and nodded quickly.

“Yes, I am his plaything. He told me to come here and keep you company while he plays sex with another woman.” Lannie was smiling so much her cheeks were beginning to numb.

“Wait – another woman!?” the woman yelled, rubbing her temples. “Wait,” he thought for a moment, “You mean his fiancée?”

“I dunno. I just wanna play.” Lannie stretched and let out a squeaking yawn.

“What’s his fiancée’s name?” The woman thought, snapping her fingers, eyes rolled upward a bit to the sky. “Lacy? Leslie? Uhh, Annie? No, it starts with . . . Lannie! That’s it. His fiancée is named Lannie.” The woman looked at the doll, and she didn’t immediately make the connection, even as the toy held her silver key in her own hands. But then her eyes narrowed, and the calculations began to filter into her pretty head.

Lannie smiled sweetly, “I want to play dress-up, Kelly.” The woman’s eyes broke open wide, and she turned to run from the doll. Running, however, merely exposed her back to Lannie, who was quick to force the

key deep into Kelly. The woman fell to the floor, arms and legs suddenly locked up. Lannie turned the key five times, and with each turn Kelly fell more into an emotionless, robotic stance.

“You are such a fool, Kelly, thinking you could ruin my life without a fight. You, or him.” Lannie’s eyes twinkled as she had a fun, new idea. She wondered how far she could take the magic gifted her by the wizard. Lannie let go and the key began to turn.

Kelly began to change with each click of the key. Her skirt and top merged together to become a colorful and chaotic jester’s motley, with tassel skirt and collar. Her stockings merged into tights before turning solid yellow. Her leather shoes turned into soft red slippers with curled toes. Color drained from Kelly’s tan skin until she was porcelain white with pink lips and cheeks. A curled pink dunce cap with colorful stars embroidered on it rose from her head.

It was then the real fun began, as Kelly shrank to a proper toy size. A stand materialized from Kelly’s lower back and extended to the ground. Almost a foot and half tall, it soon held the doll entirely in the air. Her arms and legs had fallen limp, but springs appeared inside her shoulders and hips, forcing her limbs to spread wide, as if she were jumping jacks.

A colorful wooden box materialized from the base of the toy’s stand, painted and carved to look like a child’s alphabet block. The words ‘Kelly Fool’ were carved into the front of the box in multi-colored letters. Lastly, a small handle appeared on the side of the block, which was connected to a music box and latch.

Lannie lay down on her stomach to look her toy in the eye. Kelly Fool’s mouth was contorted into a crazed smile befitting a jester jack in the box. “That’s the spirit, doll.” Lannie smiled sweetly, “I think I’ll take you home with me. How does that sound?”

Kelly Fool didn’t reply, she only smiled. Lannie pushed the Jack back into her Box and sealed the lid shut, smiling again as she thought of the poor toy contorted inside her box, with her legs folded up against her head.

Lannie breathed in the crisp autumn night, and wondered how many more toys she might cook up with her magic key.

Lannie Doll and the Overbearing Boss

Lannie's fabulous Halloween night passed into memory, but it was never forgotten, and she replayed that awesome holiday in her head over and over again. The thrill of it all – the costumes, the revenge, and the magic key spread an intoxicating happiness through her every time she thought about that night. In the days since then she approached life with an entirely different eye. Bucking the fall trends of earthy tones, she frequently dressed herself in bright sweaters that were typically paired with knee-length skirts and tights. She talked more, laughed more, and was an overall happier person since that Halloween.

There was, however, a single sore spot left in Lannie's life; that of her boss Georgia, a shrewd, conniving middle aged woman. She was pretty, to be sure, with lush red hair, typically dyed to give it an extra pop. But she was never content with her own image and constantly shifted her hairstyles and makeup. The constant attention to her appearance paid off, and she was a fetching lady, but it came at the price, ironically, of a nonexistent social life. But there were other, worse, things about Lannie's boss, and they manifested themselves two weeks after she received the magic key.

That day began as many others do with the whole department filing into a cramped conference room to discuss recent happenings and plan for the future. But it also served as a showcase for Georgia to assert herself over her workers.

"Carl, did you get the reports back from the Westminster account?"

“Uh,” the college wunderkind said as he shuffled into his folio, “I thought we didn’t need those for another three days?”

“Well, I’d like to see how they’re coming.” Georgia tapped her foot and waited, not really expecting anything. To her, and most of the room’s surprise, Carl pulled a stack of papers from his folder.

“This is most of it.” He said, “There are a few more things I need to get, but I think it’s about 85% done.” He slid the papers to Georgia, barely hiding a smirk. Lannie quickly turned away from her boss and fiddled with her ponytail to hide a brimming smile of her own.

“These are . . . good,” Georgia said. This was the way it had always been in meetings lately; strange sparring matches between Georgia and Carl, and it looked as though he now controlled the tempo of the game. The meeting ended soon after that battle and as Lannie left, Carl grazed her arm and gave her a quick thank you, as it had been Lannie who warned him that Georgia was looking to get the report back early. She replied that it wasn’t a problem, and left the room with a smile.

After returning from lunch that day, Lannie had barely sat down before her phone began to ring. An odd occurrence, but she didn’t think much of it.

“GQS, this is Lannie Doll speaking.” She said. The words popped out of her on instinct, and she didn’t even realize she had said them until a few hours later.

“Lannie, this is Georgia. Could you come to my office, please?”

“Sure,” She replied, and quickly walked to the corner office just three doors down. While it had a beautiful view of the city skyline, only two small vertical windows let passerby in the office see inside.

“Close the door and take a seat.”

Lannie nodded and did as her boss instructed.

Georgia folded her hands on her desk. “I wanted to talk to you about Carl.”

“What about?”

“Well, I wanted to know how he knew I was going to ask about the Westminster account today.”

“I told him.” Lannie quickly said, not a bit of remorse in her voice.

“Why?”

“I thought he should know. Was it wrong to tell a coworker something that would help them, and the rest of the team?”

Georgia shook her head and rubbed the bridge of her nose. “Lannie, I don’t think you understand: by knocking Carl down a peg, I’m trying to help you, Crissy, Amanda, and Valerie.”

“I’m not following.”

Her boss sighed, “Look, of the thirteen people working in this department, nine are women who have been with this company for longer than Carl, including you. But, when the next round of promotions comes, who do you think is going to get the big office?”

“To be fair, Carl is one of the best employees in the region.”

“What about the harassment?”

“I –” Lannie looked around the room in disbelief, “—what harassment?”

“Oh, come on, Lannie. Just today I saw him grab your arm and whisper in your ear.”

“Well, yeah, but . . .”

“Look, you don’t have to be afraid of Carl. We can take this down to HR right now and get him out of the building by the weekend.”

Lannie’s mouth dried as she began to understand Georgia’s implications. “I can’t . . . he hasn’t done anything!” She said.

Georgia sighed and stood up. She turned her back to Lannie and looked out over the majestic city.

“Lannie, if you don’t say something about Carl, someone will.”

Lannie looked around the office helplessly. She couldn't just accuse someone of something they never did. But, she needed this job so . . . And then Lannie remembered that earlier in the day she had packed her magic key in her purse. She quietly reached inside her bag and took out the plush silver key. Georgia's back was turned; it would be easy for Lannie to get the key into her. Lannie Doll took a breath and quietly stepped behind Georgia, and a moment later slid her silver key into her boss's back. She twisted five times and then let the changes begin.

In her first steps to dollhood, Georgia's red hair wrapped itself into tight red buns over both ears and a black fur hat materialized upon her head. Her low-cut satin blouse turned bright red, the buttons turning shiny gold. Sleek black business pants shortened and changed shape into a navy blue skirt with gold trimming. Sharp heels grew into calf-high black boots with gold buckles, and her legs became encased in opaque black tights.

Once her Russian Cossack costume was complete, sharp red circles painted themselves upon the apples of each cheek, accompanied by feminine black eyelashes and bright red lips. Georgia began to shrink to a less than impressive doll size, and as she did her body took on a sanded wood polish. Mechanical joints formed beneath her clothing at various points. And then for the coup-de-grace: strings began to rise from each hand, foot, and her head, and tied themselves to a newly formed marionette handle.

Lannie picked up her silver key and put it into her purse, then grabbed her marionette by her handle to bring her to eye level.

"I'm not going to be your puppet, Georgia."

The rest of that day moved at a hectic pace, but Lannie was still relaxed when she arrived home and set her new toy upon a makeshift stand, setting the Cossack marionette next to her Jester jack-in-the-box. She smiled sweetly and sat in a chair facing her toys.

"Well, it looks like I have the makings of a collection. Don't worry, I'll treat you two better than you treated me."

Lannie Doll and the Anxious Shopper

Kelly never liked to admit it, but she was terrified of the smothering dark of night. She had never told a soul, and always slept with a night light in her room. Naturally, then, the worst part of her new life was the dark of her box. She would savor the daylight and the feeling of the world around her, but come night when Lannie would shove Kelly Fool back into the black of her box, her toy would wait desperately for the morning.

While she waited, the jester would dream herself into another place. Sometimes, she would dream about being with Mark, going to work, or even performing foolish acts for a king. And while Kelly did dream of doing to Lannie what she had done to her, the toy would only ever do so in the first half of the night. It was in the first half of the night when Kelly hated her owner the most. Unfortunately, her dreams were always invaded by the oppressive black and always short lived.

So, for most of the night she waited with frozen anticipation for the music box to begin to play. The sound would begin distantly and quietly, but it grew in strength into a childish crescendo, and then . . . the box lid would rocket into the air, Kelly Fool not far behind. Each of her arms and each of her legs would spread out to the four corners of the world, and the foolish toy would greet her Owner with the insane smile of a woman about to perform the world's greatest stunt. And Lannie was always there to smile back with sparkling white teeth and brilliant blue eyes.

“Good morning, Kelly Fool. How was your night?” She would say in a sing-songy voice. Then she would tap her toy upon her head and skip away to begin the day. That brilliant, bright face was the reason Kelly would only dream nasty things about Lannie during the first half of the night. Because during the first half of the night, the image of Lannie shoving her toy back into the box was fresh in her mind. But Kelly would soften through the night as she remembered it would also be Lannie to rescue her from that box.

Saturdays had taken on a great deal of importance to Lannie since she got her silver key, because it was on Saturdays that she could finally draw cute pink circles on each cheek., put on her pink puffy dress, and simply unwind from the week behind her. But this Saturday was shaping up to be different on account that Christmas was coming and Lannie still needed to buy presents.

So on this particular Saturday, she put on a constricting pair of tennis shoes, jeans, and t-shirt to brave the world, hoping they would not see through her façade of normalcy.

“I have to go shopping,” Lannie pouted. She was standing in front of Kelly Fool and Comrade Georgia, both of whom looked at her with contagious smiles. Lannie’s silver key stood between them on their shelf and was the centerpiece of her collection. “I know you want to play, but this is something people need to do.” Her toys continued to smile. “Stop looking at me like that. We can play other days, just not today. OK?” When neither toy replied, Lannie nodded pertly and walked out the door. But two seconds after she locked it, she came barging back in, sprinting back to the shelf, where she picked up her silver key.

Lannie smiled sheepishly at her dolls. “You never know,” she said.

Lannie had tried her very best to stay away from the mall that day. But after only managing to get a quarter of her gifts over the span of three hours, she had to admit defeat and charged headlong into the crowded mall parking lot and the thousands of hurried shoppers inside.

In the span of forty minutes, Lannie came across a driver who waited in the park aisles waiting for a person to back out of their spot, a soccer mom who smelled like she had been shopping since five in the morning, a gaggle of children who ran in front of Lannie and nearly tripped her, a quick moving man in a business suit who tackled her for just getting in his way, and thirty shoppers who dug around in their pockets or purses for exact change.

So, at six o'clock, after seven hours of hurling across town and across mall concourses, Lannie took a comfy chair in the bookstore to rest her weary feet and forget about everyone in the entire world outside of a book. For a while, the public respected Lannie's wishes to ignore them, until a girl sat down in a seat across from her.

She was younger than Lannie, probably college aged with a body that looked like it couldn't get fat. But Lannie couldn't really tell, as the girl was wearing baggy blue sweatpants and a black hoodie one size too large. She saw the girl look a little sadly at her Christmas list, sigh, and open a collection of poetry.

That should have been the end of Lannie's interaction, but five minutes later an annoying sound crashed upon her ears like an ocean wave. It was a constant, monotone hum, and it was incessant upon its invasion of Lannie's mind. The girl was the surprising source of the humming. She was now flipped around with her legs dangling over the armrest, her foot bobbing up and down in loose Ugg boots to an unheard rhythm. She stopped humming for a bare few seconds to refill her lungs, and then proceeded to make the incessant noise once again.

"Excuse me," Lannie said, "could you please stop that?"

The girl looked up quickly. "What?" she asked.

"You were humming just now and it was a little annoying."

She put her hand over her mouth quickly while her cheeks grew red. "Ohmigosh. I'm so sorry. I just forg – I'll stop," she said, realizing she was making things worse by talking.

“Thanks,” Lannie said, returning to her book and feeling for the first time today that she had accomplished something. The beautiful silence lasted only three pages, and just as Lannie was about to fully wrap herself inside the fantasy world, she heard the monotone humming once again.

“Excuse me, but you’re doing it again.”

The girl looked over, and again she turned red. “I’m sorry; I don’t even realize I’m doing it.” The pair both turned back to their books, but a minute later Lannie heard the girl rummaging through her plastic bags, once again breaking the serene silence of the reading nook. Lannie looked over to her, and the girl quickly noticed her staring. “Sorry,” she said, “I’m just going to get moving. I’ll be out of your way in just a minute.” But just as she said that one of her large gray backs broke, spilling out clothes, toys, and DVDs.

The girl’s shoulders slumped, and she slid down, legs stretched out in front of her, and her head lolling back on the chair seat. The way she sat immediately sparked a thought in Lannie’s mind, and she remembered the silver key in her purse. But she put that thought aside and got up to help the girl with her presents.

“This was going to be the first time I spent my own money for Christmas,” the girl said, “and the first time I was going to be living on my own.” She rubbed her eyes, “And then the wreck happened . . . does it get easier?”

Lannie shook her head, “It just gets bigger. You move into larger houses and get more stuff.”

The girl deflated, and Lannie put a hand on her shoulder.

“You know, sometimes what I do to unwind is put on a set of really soft and comfy clothes and just sit on my bed.”

“And do what?”

“Be a toy,” Lannie said, “just sit and pretend that I don’t have to do a thing in the world but be there for my owner when she comes home.”

“That sounds nice,” the girl said as Lannie handed her a pile of folded clothes.

The younger woman recomposed herself and gathered her things together. She turned and made the best goodbye wave she could to Lannie with shopping bags in either hand. "I'm Erin, by the way."

"My name's Lannie." She said, nodding in return. The girl walked off. Lannie watched her go, and wondered how much longer it would be for the world to overwhelm Erin once again. She heard the siren-like tick of her silver key.

Erin was invigorated by her conversation with the brunette woman. She felt, for now, that there was a light she could reach if she worked hard enough for it. But as she walked away, she felt the strangest feeling on her back, and she immediately stopped moving. The feeling was almost imperceptible, like someone pushing a rounded plastic cup into her spine. Whatever it was froze her in place. Then a click began to echo inside her body, like someone wound a watch inside her.

The clicking stopped and Erin felt the familiar sensation of prickling needles, as if she had been numb all her life and was just waking up. It didn't hurt, and in fact it made her feel alive. So entranced was she by the feeling that she didn't notice the changes that began to sweep over her body.

Her black hoodie zipped itself together and from the bottom edge turned white as short fur sprung up all over it. Erin's blue sweatpants split into a top and bottom halves. The top half changed to black and began to grow fur, while the bottom tightened into black form-fitting leggings. Her suede boots, too, turned black, but remained a bit loose on her feet. Erin's sleeves separated from her hoodie and scrunched up below her elbow, the bottom end wrapping around her hand to form furry black paws. Her T-shirt below also lengthened until it covered every bit of her arms in tight black cloth.

With the bulk of her costume finished, Erin began to shrink. Her head and neck, the only places of her skin still exposed, gained the soft textured pattern of cloth, and a white fur hood flipped up to reveal round black ears. She then fell to the ground, now only a little doll wearing a white and black panda bear costume.

Erin became aware once again of herself, and felt warm and soft fingers wrap around her middle, squishing her tummy and abdomen more than they should have. She was picked up until she could look into the brunette woman's caring blue eyes.

"I think this will help you relax a little."

Erin believed her.

Later that night, long after Lannie had returned home and introduced Erin Bear to Kelly Fool and Comrade Georgia, the doll's owner began to prepare for the night. One by one she turned off lights through the kitchen and living room, coming ever closer to her mantle of dolls above her fireplace. Worry and fear began to build inside Kelly Fool. The dark of her box seemed to be reaching for her, clawing and scraping to smother the jack-in-the-box in shadow.

Kelly pleaded, her mind crying for somebody – anybody – to hear her. The dark whispered in her ear, and Kelly tried to escape it, but her box kept her in her place. Lannie came to the fool, and her fingers pressed down on the jester's head. The doll began to plead louder, and in her mind, she threw her plastic arms around her owner's finger, trying desperately to stay in the light. The shadows of her box reached up and smothered Kelly's bright yellow legs in the inky black. The jester cried a final, hopeless, shout.

Lannie stopped.

She pulled her fingers from Kelly's head. The jack-in-the-box jumped back up, springy arms and legs throwing off the hungry shadows of her box. The doll's owner looked at her with a wary sideways glance, as if wondering about something impossible she had heard.

"I'll leave you out tonight, Kelly Fool. How does that sound?"

The jester replied with her normative crazed grin.

“That’s what I thought.” She tapped her doll quickly on the head, making Kelly bounce, then left for bed. For the first time in ages, Kelly had a real dream. Funnily enough, she dreamed she was a jester dancing for her queen.

Lannie Doll and the Ungrateful Driver

Erin had been sleeping in a way, because since she was turned into a doll, it was difficult to tell what was real and what was a dream. Her entire life now should be fake; some kind of bizarre illusion, because people can't be turned into little dolls in bear costumes. Except, that's exactly what happened to Erin three days ago. She had been leaving a bookstore when Lannie – a woman she had known for all of ten minutes – used a magic, silver key to turn her into a toy.

Lannie then took Erin home, and sat her upon a shelf with a multicolored jester jack-in-the-box and a red coated marionette. In those three days sitting on the shelf, Erin had not moved one tiny bit without the help of Lannie or gravity. But around noon on the third day, Erin Bear woke from a dream and did something miraculous – she stood up.

It took a moment for Erin to recognize that she had even done such a wonderful thing. “Ohmigosh!” She whispered, pawed fuzzy hands shaking with excitement. She looked down at her own body, and the fuzzy black and white hoodie she wore. Erin poked herself, just to make sure she actually was filled with stuffing, a fact that she confirmed when her left paw sank into her tummy. Erin pulled her arm out and looked at her hand quizzically. It was just a simple half oval attached to her arm. It had no fingers or thumb, and it was covered in short black fur. She turned it over to see an oblong pink pad.

Curious, Erin tried to pull her paw off to see if there was a hand beneath it, but after a few seconds of

uncomfortable tugging, she had to admit the paw was her only hand. She looked down again, and took a particular interest in her short black boots. Like most of her it was covered in short fuzz. It seemed to not be entirely attached to her foot, as she could wiggle her leg back and forth just a bit. Erin quickly threw her left foot into the air and grabbed it with her paws, then bounced up and down trying to yank her fuzzy boot off. But it too had been sewn onto her body.

“Hmmm.” She hummed, scratching her head while looking around for something a doll could accomplish on her own. And then she caught sight of something across the way; a mirror that faced the fireplace mantle all three dolls lived on. In the mirror, Erin Bear could see the jack-in-the-box leaping from her colorful cube, and the Cossack marionette hanging from strings, standing at attention as best she could while hanging in the air. And then Erin saw herself in a panda bear costume. But she wasn’t standing up pondering the reflection, but rather sitting down in the undignified limp way she had for the past three days.

Erin thought on the reflection for a moment, and then came to the discovery that she was once again sitting propped against the back wall, her arms fallen dead to her sides and head rolling just a bit to the right. She once again found that she was unable to move, and Erin could only wonder why.

Lannie walked from her room, still tired for no reason at all in the middle of the day. She was dressed in overly large pink jammies littered with clouds, stars, and crescent moons. She sleepily rubbed her forehead, wondering if she really had slept until one o’clock, and felt a bit depressed that it was true. But she looked back up to her toy shelf, and her toys, which she knew were happy because they all were smiling.

“Good morning, little toys. Did you sleep well?”

Comrade Georgia kept her arm high, placed perfectly by strings so she always stood ready to defend Lannie from whoever might hurt her. Erin Bear lay against the wall, her hoodie pulled up over her head, as if she was resting beneath a shade tree. And then vibrant Kelly the crazed jester took flight from her box, and a

glint in her eyes sparked a memory in Lannie's mind. The woman cocked her head to one side and put her thoughtful finger up to her cheek.

"Kelly Fool, I think we need to have a talk." Lannie glanced at her other toys. "Alone." She added. The doll collector grabbed the jack-in-the-box carefully by the cube and took the toy back to her room, where she put Kelly down on the TV stand across from her bed. After she carefully closed her door so no one could eavesdrop, Lannie turned back to Kelly Fool.

"Now, I may be going crazy, Ms. Kelly, but I have the distinct memory that you moved and talked a few nights ago. I was getting ready for bed, turning off all my lights and the night was normal, until I came to tuck you in. I remember that I was putting you back in your box when I heard a scream, and I felt something wrap around my finger." Lannie knelt so she could look at Kelly face to face. The little jester wore colorful paint and a bright red smile on her face. "Was that you, Kelly? You can tell me, I won't be mad."

The fool kept her lips tight, but her smile now looked to hold a secret.

Lannie laughed and she ran her fingers through her brunette hair. "Of course you can't move, you're just a little jack-in-the-box." Lannie tapped the jester on her head, and then walked to her closet where she kept her own costume. She pulled down her pink dress and its accompanying shoes and was about to put them on when she saw a forgotten thing in her closet. Lannie got back up and pulled down the pretty costume, and smiled just as brightly as she did when she first laid eyes on it back in October.

She spun around and held the top up so Kelly Fool could see it. "This was going to be my Halloween costume this year. I would have been just a pretty fairy. But then I found out about you and Mark and got my doll costume and key." Lannie stroked her chin. "I suppose I could wear this for a change."

Feeling no shame to change in front of Kelly, Lannie pulled off her pajamas and slid into a pair of tan hose; their thickness and texture giving her legs a cloth appearance. She added tiny wreaths of pink petals just above each of her ankles. Then she slid into the costume's green leotard, to which wings had been sewn. Her

collar was made from strips of pink cloth cut to appear as leaves. She then put on a wrap skirt, which was multilayered with green and pink leaves, and tied together by a rose. Lastly, Lannie put on her fairy cap, made to look like an upside down flower bulb.

She looked to her mirror for guidance and made slight adjustments to the position of her garments. Lannie saw Kelly Fool's reflection in the glass, and asked her what she thought. Even though Kelly was a jack-in-the-Box, and they had just had a discussion about moving and talking, the toy jumped off her stand and replied to her question.

"Well, I don't think you look much like yourself," she said, "you need a little more doll in you."

Lannie wagged her finger at her toy, "You're right. You're absolutely right, Ms. Kelly Fool." Skipping over to the silver key, she slid into the small of her back just below where her silvered wings attached to her leotard. Once attached, Lannie could wind it the requisite five times she needed to trigger a transformation with only her mind. The silver key clicked and clacked until it could move no more, and so she released it.

The fairy woman guided her transformation with her mind, and she watched as her four fingers pulled together and formed a solid mitt of cloth. Her thumbs both shrunk to make them stumpier. Her hands and arms were then covered in tan fabric, which also spread across her chest. Pink doll freckles popped into existence on each cheek, and her hair wound into thin strands of short white yarn. When these changes were done, Lannie's key slid out of her back and left her feeling a little more at home.

"Thank you, Miss Fool." She said, turning around to the Jack-in-the-Box, who had already returned to her post and looked as wild as ever. Lannie picked her bright box up and brought the toy back to her place on the shelf.

Two hours later, Lannie lay on the couch, and from her high up perch, moved Comrade Georgia's marionette handle and had the toy marching like a perfect Russian Cossack. Lannie's stomach twisted and

gurgled, even though she had already ordered pizza to sooth her noisy abdomen. When the doorbell rang, hunger made her jump up and throw down Comrade Georgia, who fell down with a less than graceful thud on the carpet.

Lannie slid on her stocking feet as she hit the linoleum in the foyer, but kept her balance and opened the door to reveal a delivery girl in green hat and orange shirt. She had a sharp chin and pulled her black hair into a high ponytail. She was startled by Lannie's sudden and strange appearance.

"Nice costume," she said while pulling open a pizza bag.

"Thanks," Lannie replied happily, her mouth beginning to water at the smells wafting from the pizza.

"That's \$14.23," The delivery girl said.

Lannie handed her a twenty.

"So – three back?" The driver asked.

There was a tone in the girl's voice; a touch of expectancy and it irked Lannie. "How about giving me all my change back and letting me decide how much to tip?" She snapped, taking the delivery girl aback.

"Sorry about that, Ma'am." She looked into her change back and pulled out six ones. Lannie paused for a moment then handed back five singles. The delivery girl made a short, but disappointed, nod and went back to her car. Lannie glowered at the driver's, but resigned to go back into the house. It wasn't until she set down the pizza box and looked at her mitten hand that she remembered her magic key.

Tillery had already moved on by the time she got to her green Camry and put her delivery bag in the trunk. She started mentally planning what route she was going to take to her next customer's house. Then she felt something push into her back, and she was forced to freeze.

A winding key mechanically clicked inside Tillery, releasing strange energies into and through her. When it stopped, all her bones were locked in place, making her lean forward slightly, and knocked her arms at

the elbows. The clicking stopped and Tillery heard a music box begin to play a gentle tune. The bottom of her shirt blossomed into a blue tutu. Long blue gloves glittered into existence around Tillery's arm up past her elbows. Her hat remolded itself into a plastic mold crowned by a glittery tiara. Tillery's hair took on a sparkling blue color and arranged into a bun.

"What did you do?" She said, her voice now light and airy. Tillery pulled up her left leg and spun en pointe to see the magic woman who was doing this. A cool breeze ran over her body and her skin responded by turning porcelain white. She heard crinkling as her body hardened, never to move again, with her mouth smiling a sideways grin that she did not feel.

To finish her shocking transformation into a toy, Tillery stepped onto a blue box that materialized into existence. The box was the same snow white of her skin and decorated by snow flakes that moved while her key turned. And it included a curious silver coin half buried in a slot next to her foot.

The silver plush key fell to the ground, and Tillery watched a giant's hand pick her up. "This isn't real. This has to be a dream," the ballerina thought. She tried to move, but her body felt heavy and it's joints locked by powerful gears. Tillery's owner brought her into the house, and the toy gasped in her mind when she saw three dolls lined up around the couch.

"Well, dollies, I want you to meet your newest friend. This is Tillerina. She likes to be tipped."

Tillerina saw her owner's mitten hand push the coin on the ballerina's base. All at once, her body unfroze and she danced. The new doll tried to jump off her base and run from this pretty dream, but a gear inside her porcelain body trapped her and forced her to pirouette on her tiny base. A music box played something from the Nutcracker. She danced to it for thirty seconds before returning to a demure, simple position with her hands resting lightly on her tutu and feet pointing apart.

The coin jumped out of its slot, and though Tillerina started to hate that little coin, she desperately wanted her owner to push it again so she could dance again.

Lannie's Dolls and the Magic Key

Tillerina could imagine they were all just ordinary girls in extraordinary costumes, instead of what they really were. What they had been forced to become. It was hard to hold on to that thought and ignore the huge living room that stretched before them. But when it was empty, when it was night, Tillery could imagine, and it helped her deal with being a doll.

Something else about nighttime helped her, too. Tillery could move. Sort of. Maybe. And not just her, but the other toys. Kelly Fool the jester was the best at it. When twilight came, she bounced out of her box and helped Erin Bear wobble to her boots. But despite their help and encouragement, Tillery hadn't managed to get off her stand. She could sit down, wrap her arms around her legs, and talk with the others.

"I kinda always wanted to be a ballerina," she said, smoothing out her tutu, and thinking how much prettier it would be if she was still full sized.

"Well now you are!" Kelly said happily, trying to pirouette like a dancer, but wobbly jester ankles weren't made for dancing and she fell to the mantle, laughing.

"What made you not learn to dance?" Erin said. She sat cross legged and shook her head at the clown, but smiled just the same.

The ballerina shrugged, "I don't have a good answer for that. I just . . . never did."

“You should. If we get back to being human, that is. I bet you’ll be pretty great at it.”

Tillery smiled, “Thanks. What about you? What would you do when we get changed back?” Her psychology major mind told her not to hope, so she wouldn’t be disappointed. She pushed those thoughts aside.

The panda girl winced. “Oh, God, I don’t know. It’s too late to sign up for the spring semester. And I bet I’ve been fired. And my apartment is probably already gone.” Erin thought about it further, and her frown turned around. “Which, I guess means I’ll have a fresh start once this is over.”

“Well, I have a couch if you need it for a few nights,” Tillery said, “I think my place is still mine.” It had been almost a week since the mad lady with the magic key transformed her, and rent wasn’t due till the beginning of the month.

“You’d do that?” Erin Bear asked. “We’re kinda strangers.”

Tillery laughed, “I haven’t decided if I’m hallucinating this entire conversation or not.”

“Do you have a good shelf for me?” Kelly said, scooting closer to get back into the conversation.

“You really don’t want to be human again?” Tillery asked.

Kelly’s spring body shuddered and her bells rang out, “Blech. No. Humans are big and boring, and being one is not nearly as magical as being a Kelly-in-the-Box.”

Georgia, the marionette who refused under any circumstances to move, groaned. “Listening to you three yammer on is a level of hell itself. A stupid level.” The marionette glowered at all of them. “We got turned into toys. We don’t deserve to be human again.”

“Keep being no-fun Georgia, Georgia,” Kelly Fool said as the sun finally broke above the horizon and poured its brilliant light into the living room. All four toys found themselves back in their proper places and poses, as if they had never moved at all.

Erin Bear waited patiently for the door to Lannie's bedroom to open. She had fallen to a slight flop over night, her front paws unable to support her. But she knew her Owner would put her up right again. And that wasn't so bad.

Despite it being a Thursday, Lannie came out of her room very much not ready for work. In fact, she had on her fairy dress. The pink and green one with wreaths of flowers around her ankles. The one that she wore on days where she pretended to be a doll herself. Which very much meant she was not going to work that day. That has been happening more often lately.

"Good morning, my little collection," she said with a brilliant smile. As she always did, she gave each of her toys a little hello. Bopping Kelly Fool. Saluting Comrade Georgia. Posing Erin Bear. Activating Tillerina.

"What's up today, boss?" Kelly asked, as if Lannie could hear her. And their owner looked at the jack-in-the-Box. It was plain to everydoll to see consideration in her expression.

"It's a play day, I think," she said finally, answering the toy's question.

"Hey, can you hear us?" Erin asked. But her owner didn't respond or react. So much for that idea, and another day of being a simple toy began. For Erin, that meant trying her best to stay in the pose her owner put her in, all while feeling her plush give way hour by hour. Georgia and Kelly swung or wobbled ever so slightly. Only Tillerina, in her pointe shoes, kept statue still.

As for Lannie, she watched TV. Until she did something odd. Without pausing, she walked to her bedroom and came back holding her magic silver key. She pushed it into her back with practiced precision, and it automatically wound the requisite five times. This had happened before, when their owner felt the worst. Or when she felt the giddiest. Or when she felt nothing at all. Owner was enigmatic.

The key turned and Lannie's body shifted, rippled, and changed into something Erin Bear appreciated. Something soft and huggable, a rag doll fairy with yarn hair.

"Cheater," Comrade Georgia said.

“I really don’t get you,” Erin said, wanting, but unable, to turn away from her owner going slightly mad with her key.

“She can’t just turn herself into a doll, and pretend that she’s human. She’s one of us now.”

“Well, you tell her that,” Erin said.

The key had almost finished its revolutions and Lannie’s body became exactly what she wanted it to be. Then, she shuddered. Something clicked and clattered to the ground. Their owner’s eyes went wide, she gasped, and then shrunk until she laid immobile on her carpet, her amazing key lying next to her.

But more amazing than all of that, Kelly Fool hopped out of her box. “Boss, you ok?” She yelled down to their owner. And when no response came, the jester jumped off the mantle.

Kelly Fool jangled and bounced on her springy legs to get to her boss. The newest toy of the Collection hadn’t moved a single thread, but that was normal. Kelly was the weird one, but never gave the whole mobility thing much thought. Right now, she was worried about Lannie. The poor toy probably didn’t know what she messed up and was scared out of her plush mind.

“Hey, boss, how are you doin?”

“Kelly?” Her small, confused voice came. “Am I dreaming this, or are you moving?”

“Both. Neither. I don’t know, why are you asking me?” Kelly said. She sat the fairy doll up, pulling her by limp rag doll arms that did not want to help one bit. The jester knew that feeling, that total immobility of being a doll. It was terrifying at first, until it became the way of things.

She looked from Lannie to the key, which was giant and dormant. It appeared so simple, not even magical. But everytoy in the house knew exactly how it worked and what it could do.

“Be right back, boss.”

Kelly sprang to the key, over Lannie’s disbelieving protests. She studied it with all the intensity of a

writer studying her story, wondering half at the possibilities, and half at her own wants.

“You can’t use that!” Lannie said, “It’s not for toys!”

“If it’s not for toys, it’s not for you, either,” the jester said. She knelt and touched the magical object and a vibrant wave spread through the key. It shimmered and melted, and Kelly jumped away from it, until it stopped. And instead of being several feet tall and long, the key shrunk, becoming perfect for a toy-sized girl. There was a gleam to it, a pull. It was the very same key that had turned Kelly from breathing woman to jumping jack doll. And not just her, but five others.

“That power could be mine,” she whispered, hefting the key in her awkward hands.

“Kelly! What are you doing with that key?” Lannie asked, fear palpable in her voice, but what kind of fear the jester couldn’t tell.

“I really don’t know!” The fool said happily, and it was true. Could she turn herself human with it? Kelly wrinkled her nose. Ew. She could make herself new friends. But she’d probably have to turn herself human, go meet new people, turn the fun ones into toys, and...it all just seemed like a lot of work. Then, she turned back to the mantle, where she knew already toy friends sat.

“Kelly Fool, as your owner, I command you to give me the key so I can fix myself.”

“In a minute, boss,” Kelly said, walking toward the fireplace, and her friends.

Comrade Georgia seethed on her strings. Dangling as she ever did, she could look down at that disrespectful jester and that cheating fairy. Didn’t they realize that they were both playthings? That they were all playthings? There was no fate for them but to remain that way. When Lannie set that key in their backs, they lost their humanity. Even if they did somehow transform back, it wouldn’t change things. Once you become owned, there’s no going back. She knew that, and she had to teach them that lesson, too.

Kelly left her view, hidden beneath the mantle shelf, but her ridiculous clowny voice called up, “Erin! I

have the key, I need you to roll down here!"

Georgia saw red while the bear toy sitting next to her struggled to her booted feet.

"She has the key?" Tillerina asked. "What does that mean? Can we be changed back?"

"I think so," Erin said. They both sounded happy about that, never once considering the truth: they ought to be toys.

"Don't do it, Erin," Georgia said, "You know you can't *really* be human again." The soldierette knew the others felt it. They had all said as much in their illegal nightly conversations. None of them really felt they were people instead of property. The panda girl stopped. She had always had her doubts about being human again, and worries what that might mean. Georgia didn't let up. "Even if you did deserve it, I've heard you talk about your old life. Do you really want that back? All that worry? Bad school? Failing grades? Never getting anywhere in . . ."

"Georgia, what the hell?!" Tillerina shouted at her. The ballerina remained stuck on her stand, but she looked so cross with her hands on her tutu. "Erin, this could be our only shot to be human again. Please. If you really don't want to change back, I guess I get it. But, at least help Kelly and me."

"Oh, she doesn't understand," Comrade Georgia said, "she's only been like us for a few days. She hasn't realized what being owned means. You're owned, Erin Bear, like any common toy, and you can't change that. Ever. Those cute little circles on our faces will mark us until the end of time."

She couldn't see the teddy's face, but she saw the way she was frozen. Not like a proper stuffed toy, but wrestling with herself. Good. Comrade Georgia just needed to keep her up here, and Kelly Fool couldn't use the key. She would keep her companions. They would stay what they were supposed to be.

"If we can't change that, why are you so worried?" Erin said at last, before she fell from the mantle.

"No!" The marionette shouted. This was not happening. Her humiliation had to be shared. And though she hated to do it, Comrade Georgia saw no other choice. She slipped out of the strings holding her to

her handle. It was the first time she had moved on her own since Lannie reduced her to being a puppet all those months ago. She looked over the edge at the Bear and the Fool and jumped down to meet them.

Georgia landed just in time, just as the springy jester began to put the key into Erin's back. Not if the marionette had anything to say about it. She had landed behind Kelly Fool, and before either of them could turn, Georgia kicked the jack-in-the-box, right where she was supposed to be attached to her stand. The toy yelped as she went into a springy jumping jack pose, all automatically. She dropped the key and the cossack shoved her aside.

"Georgia, what are--" Erin said, but didn't act. The marionette got the silver key in her wooden hands, and she backed away, carrying the magical artifact away from the dolls who would use it for no good.

"You will not leave me. You will not abandon me. You will stay simple toys and we'll get a new owner." She backed away, keeping the two other dolls in her sight as they recovered.

"Were you always crazy, or just since you got strung up?" Kelly asked.

"Oh, shut up. I thought you loved being a plaything for our 'boss,' Kelly?"

"I do! But Erin and Tillery don't! I'm not going to hold them hostage just so I get to live out my toy dreams."

Comrade Georgia scoffed and continued to walk backward. It didn't matter anymore. Someone would find them, eventually, when Lannie didn't pay the rent, or the electricity. Or just didn't show up for work. It was about time someone fired her. Someone would come looking, and they would find five dolls ready to be purchased by someone else. Georgia was stronger than Erin Bear, sturdier than Kelly Fool, Tillerina was trapped on the mantle, too delicate and heavy to risk jumping down, and Lannie hadn't yet figured out she could move. The marionette had the key. No one could take it from her.

A shadow grew all around Comrade Georgia, and she looked up before her stand came crashing down.

Lannie Doll's jaw went slack as the wood and string smashed into the marionette, sending her to the carpet. She managed, just barely, to crane her neck up and see her ballerina toy standing near the edge of the mantle. This wasn't happening. She refused to believe her own eyes and lose her playthings that she had worked so hard to collect. All because of that stupid key. She just had to see what it was like.

There was shouting between her toys, first in worry, until Erin wrestled the silver key from the pile of wood. Georgia said something indistinct. But now the others didn't waste time. That cheating fool pushed the key into the anxious shopper's back. Five twists, and it was over. The bear grew and grew, losing the plush Lannie had forced onto her, but keeping the costume. With the former bear full sized again, the overbearing boss wasn't an issue.

The ungrateful driver was next, after she hurried back to stand on her stand. She, too, remained a ballerina when she regained her humanity. The two returned people hugged and laughed, and turned to turn Kelly Fool back. But the doll held out her hand and shook her head. Instead of transforming the toy, they returned her to her proper box, where she could jump and smile and tell jokes all day.

They decided amongst themselves that the marionette deserved her fate, and they only begrudgingly dug Georgia out of her handle and stand, restoring her and making her a puppet once again. Lannie's former boss never stopped berating them, but she never disobeyed her strings again.

Then, all eyes turned to Lannie, still unmoving on the carpet. The newest toy, the least experienced, and the least deserving. The wizard gave her the key for a reason. He had told Lannie as much. But the fairy doll gulped down her pride and looked up to the two humans and one toy who would decide her fate.

"Please, just fix this. We can go our separate ways," Lannie said, her voice small and full of contrition. She remembered the lying lover pleading with her last Halloween. And she remembered what she did to him.

The two humans and toy all looked at each other, but it was the cheating fool who spoke. "Lannie, I don't have any hard feelings for you. But my new bosses, they're a bit madder than I am. Plus, you got a taste

for turning people into toys. I think it's best we let you stay as you are."

Lannie Doll slumped. It was the most movement she had managed so far, and just enough that it threw her stuffing out of balance. Helplessly, she fell back onto the ground, left lying there as nothing more than a toy while her collection left her house and her life.

The End