

The Complete Set

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A Ye Olde Toys Story

Bailey was popular but had always been “not like other girls.” She chose track over cheerleading, and had more fun programming than chatting on her computer. She had an athletic and somewhat tall body with long and lean legs which Bailey frequently covered in tights. She never really knew what to do with her hair, and had kept a simple straight cut for nearly all her life.

While she was popular, Bailey had always kept her birthday parties, even her important ones, small and private. Today was her eighteenth birthday and it was held at her aunt’s house with just a few people from her family and only a select group of friends whom Bailey trusted. Among those trusted people, strangely, was a girl named Christine. The two had climbed the same school ladder for their entire lives, and been in many of the same classes. Yet, Bailey never really knew Christine.

She was a quiet girl, interested in drawing and painting. On occasion, Bailey had asked to see her work, but Christine blushed and declined. When she could, Christine always sat near Bailey, but always on the outer rim of the clique that surrounded her. And, though she didn’t really know Christine, Bailey trusted her.

Throughout the party, Christine sat as she always did, on the edge of the commotion. Her head remained down for much of the time, and when the cake came out and everyone sang happy birthday, her voice would have been barely audible, even without a crowd of people around her. Earlier, Bailey had pulled Christine

aside and asked what was wrong, but the girl tried to put on a valiant face that wouldn't have fooled a blind man, saying that nothing was wrong. But Bailey didn't believe it, and gave Christine a long hug. She thought she heard the girl whisper, "Please take care of her."

When the time came for presents, it appeared to be one of those birthdays where Bailey wouldn't get the thing she wanted most. And so, she wasn't terribly excited as she opened Christine's present. Bailey ripped apart green wrapping paper from her last present, revealing a plain white box. Tentatively, she opened it and saw a rag doll inside wrapped in tissue cloth.

"She's so cute," Bailey said, but she held the doll by one arm as if it was dirty.

Christine smiled bittersweetly. "Thanks," She said with a voice only half an octave above a whisper.

With another smile, Bailey put the doll back down and the party continued on. She never noticed Christine leave after that.

Later that night, Bailey was doing her homework. Splayed out upon her bed, she had math and history books spread around her. But Bailey was one of those miraculous people who enjoyed math, and liked math puzzles to relax and unwind from the day.

That was on a normal night. But tonight, Bailey had a strange, uncomfortable feeling of paranoia. When she couldn't shake it, she stood up and sat at her computer desk, where her small pile of presents sat. Three impersonal gift cards and cash had come from four of her guests; a book she would never read came from another. Bailey's eyes drifted to Christine's doll, and she quickly realized that was what was causing her paranoia.

There was something unsettling about the little rag doll and her green dress. It was such a strange gift and didn't fit Bailey or Christine. Her black cloth feet were oblong ovals connected to green striped legs. She

wore a green dirndl dress, with corset and skirt trimmed in red and white flowers. Little white mittens were sewn onto each hand, and her green hair was capped by an overly large white bow.

But it wasn't the doll's costume that drew Bailey's attention, but rather her face. Where the rest of the toy was puffy, round, and soft, her face looked so very real. Egg shaped and proportioned perfectly, the doll's face was painted a bit whiter than the rest of her. Bright red lips and soft pink cheeks drew out the verdant green of the little doll's eyes. Bailey drew the doll closer and looked deep into her eyes. Made of plastic, they had a perfect sheen to them that made them sparkle with life.

Her phone rang and pulled Bailey from the doll, and she didn't know how long it had been going off. She didn't recognize the number, but took the call anyway. She said hello, but no one replied and hung up a second later. Bailey shook her head, thought about calling them back, but turned back to her little green toy.

"I think you need a name," Bailey said, placing the toy on her desk, and setting her so she could look directly at the doll. She worked through each letter of the alphabet in a haphazard way. "Sarah," She said eventually, "Your name is Sarah." Bailey's doll, of course, didn't respond but with a smile. Bailey smiled back and propped Sarah up on her desk, then returned to finish her homework before going to sleep.

Bailey dreamed about being chased by sines, cosines, and other trigonometric functions while falling amid a sea of numbers. In other words, perfectly normal dreams. But a voice began to break into her conversations. It was quiet and unassuming, barely audible than a tangent's growl. Bailey asked a circle function about the voice, but the circle didn't hear anything.

But the voice kept on, and Bailey left the strange numbers and shapes and returned to her room. The voice was louder here, and Bailey scanned around it to find its source. She saw Sarah and thought the little doll

might know where the voice was coming from.

“Sarah, do you hear that?” She asked, but the doll didn’t answer. Bailey kneeled to look at the toy and realized that she was the one talking. Sarah sounded so scared, and Bailey picked her little doll up and wrapped her up like a mother would a child. She looked down into Sarah’s plastic eyes. “It’s going to be alright.”

Bailey looked deeper and deeper in her toy’s green eyes until they enveloped her entire view. She fell so deep into those eyes that she fell back into her room. Except Sarah was a person and Bailey was a toy sitting on a desk. The green haired former doll paced between the window and the desk, her gloved hands grasping her hair while Bailey looked at her new rag doll body dressed in blue pajamas.

“It’s my fault.” Sarah said, “It’s my fault.”

Bailey stood up on wobbly legs and yelled to her toy, “Relax. This is just a dream. I’m not really a doll.”

Sarah knelt and looked at Bailey. “No, I broke the set. The set was complete and I broke it.” She thought for a moment. “You need to take me back. I need to go back to *Ye Olde Toys*. It’s in the mall.”

“First of all, I know where *Ye Olde Toys* is.” Bailey said, bringing a hand up and trying to hold up a finger before remembering she didn’t have fingers. “Second, you’re my doll and the best present I got this year. I’m not taking you back.”

Sarah looked back at Bailey with pleading green eyes. “It’s the only way you can help me. It’s the only way you can help yourself.”

Bailey crossed her cotton arms in defiance. “You’re my doll.”

Sarah let out a frustrated sigh and threw her arms into the air. “Just do it!” She shouted.

Bailey jumped up in her bed, surprised to find daylight pouring into her room and birds conversing outside. Sarah was still propped up on her desk. Bailey walked over to her little doll and looked into her green eyes.

“Why do I get the feeling that wasn’t a dream?” The doll smiled and Bailey sat back in her chair. She

looked outside into the vibrant blue sky and rapped her fingers on her desk before turning back to Sarah. “I’m not taking you back.”

Bailey sat at her kitchen island eating a pop tart while her mom, dad, and brother desperately tried to get ready for the day. But Bailey was, shockingly, ready to go. Dressed in her common funky clothing, including diamond patterned tights, shoddy canvas shoes, and multi-colored dress, she kept her long blonde hair simple. Sarah sat on the table in front of her, and Bailey pondered the meaning of the so-called dream she had earlier in the morning.

“What did you mean about a complete set?” She asked.

“I’m sorry, honey?”

Bailey quickly looked up to her mom. “Oh, I didn’t say anything.” Bailey finished her pop tart, put Sarah in her purse, and began to walk to the front door. The news was on the TV, and didn’t really interest Bailey. The story, she knew, was about a missing white girl.

“Authorities,” the reporter was saying, “are beginning the second day of searching for Sarah Jenson, who vanished from her home sometime late Saturday.” Bailey stopped in her tracks. Her mind first flashed to her new doll, then to Christine. More specifically, Bailey remembered Christine’s last name was Jenson.

Bailey received a few straggling happy birthdays as she walked through the cafeteria, but ignored them and instead looked around for Christine. But she realized that would be a futile effort; there would be no way

she would be in school today.

“I heard she was involved in some kind of occult group. They all dress . . .”

“ . . . Police called me about it . . .”

“ . . . her sister is all weird and stuff. I mean, who dresses like that?”

Sarah and Christine were certainly the talk of the school that day, and every conversation Bailey passed made the hairs on her neck stand on end. Every now and again, Bailey checked her purse to make sure Sarah was still inside. Once, when no one was around, Bailey looked inside and looked into her doll’s eyes.

“They’re talking about you, right?” She asked the doll.

As the day progressed, Bailey’s heart kept a fast tempo, and kept her short of breath. She ignored everybody, even, on occasion, her teachers. She kept thinking about Christine, and Sarah. Both the Sarah in her purse, and the Sarah that was missing. It was crazy to think they were the same, to think that the girl became the doll. But Bailey knew it somehow, knew it like she knew the sun was bright or that math was fun. The next question was, what would she do about it? Going to *Ye Olde Toys* like Sarah asked wasn’t an option. They may have been the ones to do this to her, and they may have no qualm about doing the same to Bailey.

She thought about Christine, who had lost a sister to some strange event. Christine must have known what happened to her sister, but could never tell a soul. The poor girl, haunted by what happened, couldn’t bear to look at the doll. So she gave her sister over to one of the few people in the world who had never been mean to her, in the hope that Bailey would take care of Sarah.

Bailey thought about these things and didn’t learn anything that day. The bell rang, and she knew that staying in school would be pointless. She needed to find Christine and try to get everything fixed. Bailey stuffed

her books back into her bag, careful to avoid Sarah, and was almost out the door when her teacher, the old white haired Mrs. Kelly called her back.

“Yes, Mrs. Kelly?”

“Bailey, I just wanted you to know I’m giving you a warning about your hair.”

“My hair? What’s the . . .” Bailey didn’t finish the sentence, and had a frightened feeling in her stomach.

“Well, Bailey, for starters, it’s purple.”

Bailey rushed to the bathroom just to confirm what she knew to be true already. She got a few laughs and points from students, but most people were accustomed to a little strangeness from Bailey, and the rest didn’t particularly care. Of course, Bailey knew what they didn’t: that she had a doll in her purse with green hair that used to be human, and that she now had violet hair without using an ounce of dye. Bailey needed just a second in the mirror, at that hair which wasn’t just purple, but almost looked like yarn somehow. She promptly left school.

Weaving through parked cars with heart pounding, Bailey kept her mind quiet enough to think. Christine probably wouldn’t be at her house due to the investigation. Even if she was, Bailey had no idea where she lived. She didn’t even know Christine’s phone number. She stopped in her tracks. The mystery call from last night. Bailey got to her car and pulled her cell phone from her pocket.

The phone rang twice and a quiet voice came through the speaker.

“H-hello?”

“Hi, is this Christine?” Bailey asked. She was afraid and growing angry, but she knew that yelling at Christine would do no good.

“Yes. Who is this?”

“Christine, this is Bailey.” She heard a gasp on the other end of the line. Bailey was careful to choose her words carefully. “Christine, I just heard about Sarah. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I – I didn’t want you to worry.”

“It’s OK. Look, I know we haven’t been close friends, but I didn’t know if you needed someone to talk to.”

“No – It’s just my family and police.”

“Would you like me to . . .”

“Yes.” Christine said, cutting Bailey off. “I need to talk to someone or I’ll go crazy.”

Christine was staying at a hotel while her house was full of police and heartache, and it was close enough that Bailey got there in just a few minutes. In the back of her mind, Bailey wondered if it was a smart idea to drive while being transformed. But the change, whatever it was, was taking its time. In the twenty minutes since Mrs. Kelly told her about her hair, it wasn’t even fully purple, and it had only the lightest curls running through it.

Once she arrived, Bailey dumped her books out of her bag to make it a little roomier for Sarah, and walked to the hotel restaurant where Christine had told her to meet. The girl didn’t see Bailey at first, even though she sat in a booth facing toward the door. But the moment Christine made eye contact, her hands came up to her mouth and her eyes began to water. Bailey was quick to sit down next to the girl and wrap her arm around her. Christine buried her face into Bailey and tried so very hard to keep the tears back.

“I’m so – so sorry.”

Bailey pulled the crying girl back. "Don't say that. This," she pointed to her purple curled locks, "Is not your fault. Don't say it is; don't believe it is."

Christine nodded.

"Say it. Say it's not your fault," Bailey told her.

"It's not my fault."

"Good. Now, how are you holding up?"

"I feel wretched." Christine looked down at her thumbs, but Bailey pulled her chin back up.

"Christine, I'm turning into a doll, and I don't know how strong I can be. But between us, I think, we can come up with a single, rational, person. OK?"

Christine nodded.

"Tell me what happened to Sarah."

She had seen the dolls in the front display of the toy store *Ye Olde Toys*. It was an interesting little shop with more character than the rest of the mall combined. Just a little bit of a curiosity, though it seemed to do well for itself. The aisles were all dressed in a rich red wood instead of plain white metal, and each was decorated with carved images representing the toys on that aisle. In addition to the collection of modern toys, the store also supported a nice selection of quaint older toys. The employees there were also quite fun, and frequently dressed in funny hats or clothes.

That Friday night, Sarah went to the store on a whim, and there she found a pair of dolls; a green one and a violet one. Each was marked at fifteen dollars, yet the set was oddly forty dollars. The violet one was the most intriguing to Sarah, and she bought the toy on a whim.

It began a few hours later, when Christine noticed her sister's hair had turned to a bright shade of green. The store had closed by that time, leaving the two sisters frightened and alone while piece by piece, over the course of two hours, Sarah became a facsimile of the green doll she left at the store.

The next day, a panicked Christine confronted the store's owner as the manhunt for Sarah began. The elderly, bald-headed man with the height and nose of a scarecrow, sneered back that Sarah had broken the set, and must face the consequences of that. Christine tried to give the violet doll back, but the man said he was already rid of it and refused to take it. The next day Christine, heartbroken and crushed, gave away her sister to Bailey.

Though Bailey was in a hurry, she never rushed Christine's story. When it was done, Christine saw that Bailey's hair was topped by a big white bow, and that her tights seemed a slightly different color. But Bailey wasn't worried about those things.

"Christine, we need to get the original violet doll, buy the green doll, and try to find the last doll of the set."

Christine shook her head, "There was no other doll. Just the two."

"Yes, there was. It was a set of three dolls, each priced at fifteen dollars. The shop was selling the set at forty. By the time Sarah got there someone had already bought the blue doll. That's why the price was odd."

"No, no, no, no, no . . ." Christine began, realizing what may happen.

"Your sister is green, I'm violet, and if we can't find the last toy, you may be the last in our set. We need to get the original set of dolls back together." Bailey rested her white mitten hands on Christine's shoulders. "Do you know where the original violet doll is?"

The girl looked up to her, blue eyes sparkling and filled with a defiant intensity. “It’s at home. I can drive.”

Twenty minutes later, Christine and Bailey were rushing away from Christine’s house. Sarah sat in Bailey’s lap, and Bailey held in her hands the violet doll that she would soon become. Her hair was already a bright violet and pulled into thick curls, topped by an off-center white bow. She wore mitten gloves, but thankfully still had fingers beneath. Her tights were now covered in violet and white diamonds. Since leaving the hotel, her multicolored dress was taking upon itself to change colors, and was now noticeably more violet.

“I have a question,” Bailey said.

“Yeah?”

“Um, just in case we’re not in time, you’ll mark me to make sure that you, uh . . .”

“I won’t lose you, or my sister.”

Bailey nodded, but she taped a note to the head of the violet doll, just in case. Christine glanced into the rearview mirror. “My hair’s a bit blue, isn’t it?”

“A bit, yeah.” In fact, it was a very strong shade of sky blue rather than Christine’s natural cherry blonde.

“It looks good like that. Maybe I’ll dye it when this is all over.” She joked, “Do you have any ideas for getting the blue doll?”

“Well, if I were to guess, I’d say that the blue doll did to her owner what this violet one is doing to us, and any new doll is also a missing person.”

“Which means the police should be investigating.”

“Right.” Bailey took out her phone and dialed 911. “Hi, I have an anonymous tip about the Sarah Jenson case . . .” She began. The car sped on to Ye Olde Toys.

“It’s weird. It takes like two hours for all your clothes to change, but only like ten minutes to actually become a doll.” Christine said. The mall was largely dead on a Monday, and the pair of girls turning into dolls attracted a little more attention than Bailey had in school earlier in the day.

“Well, that’s good news.” Bailey said. Her dress was cut exactly like Sarah’s, but lacked the embroidered flowers hers had. It was, of course, violet. The original doll was in Bailey’s purse, and she carried Sarah in her hand, held gently so she didn’t muss up the stuffing too much.

The pair walked into Ye Olde Toys, and not after two steps did the scarecrow-like owner shout:

“Ohh, no! I’m not selling you! I’m trying to be rid of toys, not get more of them! You run off to Toys ‘R’ Us if you want to be sold.”

Christine ignored the man and picked up the lone green doll sitting on its stand at the front display. “I’m buying her.”

The man grumbled and returned to the front counter. He gladly accepted Christine’s fifteen dollars. Bailey dropped the doll into her bag with the violet doll.

“So, what happens if,” Bailey said, “we get the original blue doll?”

The scarecrow shrugged, “You get all three dolls together before she’s” he pointed to Christine, “done turning herself into a doll, then that set will be complete.”

“And what about us?”

“What about you?”

“Once the old set is complete,” Christine said, “what happens to us?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You sell magic toys and don’t know what they do?”

“It’s not really my business.” He said, genuinely confused.

“Then what is your business?” Christine was undeterred and her anger grew even stronger.

“Getting rid of them,” The scarecrow said simply.

Bailey and Christine took it upon themselves to sit by the table where the original dolls had been sold. The owner grumbled at them, but Bailey said, quite happily, that they would put themselves on the stands once they were all three toys. That prospect didn’t suit the man, but he scuffled off anyway. The girls took to pointing out all the changes happening to them as they occurred.

Bailey, for her part, was nearly ready for the final change. She had manifested a puffy white shirt and her shoes were a weird hybrid between simple canvas shoes and black Mary Jane’s. Christine’s hair pulled itself into thick blue pigtails, and was topped by an overly large white bow. Her jeans had tightened into blue polka dot tights, but her t-shirt had yet to become a dress.

Christine called an employee over. He wore a red apron and had a soldier’s tall hat on his head. “So, when you guys sell us, will we come with a plaque of authenticity or something?”

“I . . . wouldn’t know.” The boy said.

“Could you go ask someone who does?” Bailey asked sweetly. “I’m about to become a doll, and I’m not sure I’ll be able to ask soon.”

“I would, but he might fire me.”

“So, has anything like this happened before?” Christine piped in.

“Uh, well,” The boy scratched his head, “I did see someone sucked into a dollhouse.”

“Ooh,” Bailey turned to Christine, “We definitely need to get ourselves a dollhouse. I don’t want to be in a toy box with like fifty other toys.”

“I’d be pretty sad if I were you two, becoming dolls and all.” The boy said.

“We are,” Christine said, “making jokes is just about the only thing keeping us from an utter breakdown.”

“Oh.” He said, and Bailey waved her hand to shoo the employee away. Her lips were colored a bright red and her cheeks were colored pink. Her eyelashes were thick and black, and her eyes had turned a deep violet. There wasn’t much time left.

With almost impeccable timing, a man and woman walked into the store. Both were well dressed, and the man carried a Ziploc bag that held the blue doll Bailey and Christine had been waiting for, as well as the violet doll who had once been a person. The girls stood up and walked to the front counter, where the detectives were already talking to the scarecrow.

“. . . anonymous tip about dolls that both Sarah Jenson and Penelope Reyes bought this past week. We found these at Ms. Reyes’ house.”

“And did you find anything at Ms. Jenson’s?” Scarecrow asked.

“No. But we did have reports that she was in this store on Friday before she went missing.”

Christine stood next to the female detective while Bailey hopped up on the counter. “We have the doll that Sarah bought.” Both police officers looked at the soon-to-be-dolls while Bailey pulled the violet and green

toys from her bag.

“Why are you two dressed like that?” The female detective asked.

Bailey waved, “You’re about to see in just a fewwww. . .” Bailey’s mouth sealed shut and pulled itself in a smile. After two hours, it was finally happening. She began to shrink at a quick rate, going from about five and a half feet tall to just six inches. A wave overtook her body, turning her tan skin to tan cloth. Fingers fused together and gloves sewed themselves into her wrists. Her arms, legs, and feet lost definition and became little more than stuffed cotton. But her face retained its human shape and even nose. Bailey fell backward and looked to the ceiling, her arms and legs limp and unmoving.

A giant arm and hand came down to scoop up the new violet doll, and Bailey’s arms and legs fell limply off Christine’s soft hand. Her stomach had apparently not been changed, as Bailey felt butterflies flit about inside her.

“See, detectives, if you don’t give me that blue doll, I’ll be just like this in about an hour.” Christine said.

“Detectives,” Scarecrow said, “this is just one of those things where you just want to accept what you’ve just seen and move on.”

It was shocking how fast the Penelope girl returned to her human form once Christine had the blue doll in her hand. In fact, she broke the Ziploc bag she was in at the seams. The detectives took this opportunity to leave the store and its strange happenings as quickly as possible. Penelope did the same, without even a goodbye or thank you uttered toward Christine and Bailey.

The girls were both extremely happy at first. Neither they nor Sarah would be spending their days in cotton form. But the changes were not reversing themselves. In fact, Christine’s change was not stopping; her

lips became the same shocking red of her sister and Bailey while her t-shirt became a blue dress. Somehow, her march to dollhood was continuing. Scarecrow was, of course, the most unhelpful person in the room, and promptly went to his office to be rid of the living dolls.

Bailey looked at the world in a frozen form, just one day after she became eighteen. The doll smile she wore on her face was infectious, and its mirthful grin seeped into her mind. Thoughts of her family and school faded, and she just wanted to think about her doll future held in the hands of a caring owner. She wasn't doing this because of some arcane magiks, but rather because it was the only way for herself to keep sane.

Christine was helpful in reinforcing Bailey's doll instincts when she took three chairs and a table from the dollhouse section and set them up on the front display. She carefully sat her sister and Bailey across from one another at the table. Christine even wrote a note proclaiming that the three dolls were not to be sold separately. With that, Christine, in blue dress and white mittens, sat on the table, waiting for the final changes to overtake her, not understanding why she was still changing at all.

As the time neared when Christine would join Bailey and Sarah, a new employee clocked on for the evening shift. She was a middle-aged woman with red freckles and youthful eyes. She wore the uniform of a red apron, but had also adorned herself with a pair of small pink wings. She approached the trio of dolls with a brown leather book. It was large, but rather thin.

"How are you doing, dear?" she asked with words brisk and quick-spoken.

"Well, I'm a few minutes from turning into a doll like my sister and best friend here." She wasn't lying, either: her cheeks were soft and pink; yellow flowers blossomed and spread across her corset and dress. Even her eyes, which had been blue since birth, had brightened to a sparkling azure. "Why is this still happening? We

completed the set; the other girl turned back into a human.”

The woman nodded, “Let me ask you this: would you leave your sister and friend if you knew you could save yourself. Would you run away and stay human, while leaving the other two to be toys?”

Christine quickly shook her head, sending fat pigtails back and forth. “Never.”

“Well, that’s why you’re becoming a toy. You three have formed a bond never to be broken. You completed one set and now you must complete another.” The woman smiled, “But don’t worry. These things have a way of working themselves out for the better.” Christine nodded, but still had jittery feelings.

“What’s the book for?” She asked.

“Well, since he—” she pointed to the office where scarecrow was hiding, “won’t keep track of goings on, I took it upon myself to. In this book is a record of all the magical toys we’ve brought in, as well as all the changes they have wrought.”

“That’s sensible.”

The woman nodded and asked Christine for names and causes, but time ran too short, and Christine finally succumbed to her dollish fate.

They were now a set complete. One doll, dressed in green, her hair cut short and close to her head, with tights of stripes. Another was dressed in blue with over-sized pigtails and polka dots dressing her legs. The last one, in violet, kept her hair long and curly while wearing diamonds on her tights. They wore matching dresses and their faces were identical. They were sisters in cloth, and could be bought as a whole for a mere thirty dollars.

The dolls passed their days talking to each other through their dreams, laughing and playing in an imaginary dollhouse. Perhaps one day, sooner or later, they would master the spell that held them bound to their

cloth forms. But for now, they were a complete set of happy, little dolls.