

Boxed

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A Ye Olde Toys Story

Dolly stood in a cruel pink prison, a thin plastic wall separating her from the world outside. Toys moved outside her box; people made them move. They were being played with! But Dolly was in her box, out of sight and out of mind to the people already playing. And the toys taunted her with their big smiles. Why should they be free while she was stuck in a box?

She wasn't always in a box with twist ties around her plastic wrists and feet trapped inside layers of cardboard. Dolly remembered a time where she could move on her own, but that confused her -- how could she move on her own? Only people could do that. But that's what she remembered, even if it didn't make sense. As she watched the milieu of people and dolls, a part of her plastic brain drifted away and she thought about that strange time when she could move and talk and decide things on her own.

She remembered -- remembered walking into the store. Dolly saw herself in her plastic mind's eye. She was short with short blonde hair, plain face, and dull clothes. She was smiling, of course, and the smile was enough to melt away the rest of her plainness. She passed a big toy out front, who bounced and bobbed with jingly bells on her pretty body. She looked happy to be here, and it made Dolly happy to be here, too. The store was simple and small with soft red carpet to walk on and each of the toy aisles was marked by beautiful wood carvings that represented the toys that could be found there.

There was a reason Dolly came into the store, and it wasn't to be boxed. But try as she might, the toy could not figure out why. It seemed very important at the time. She wandered through the store, weaving through all the aisles, and her eyes looking, but never finding, for something perfect.

Everything until she saw a strange box and a strange doll inside. No -- Dolly remembered -- there was no doll inside. That's what made the box so strange. She had picked the box off a shelf, as it had been tucked away in the back. It was a plain box. Pink with white lettering on it. But there was no toy inside. And, most strange of all, the back of the pink box was shiny like a mirror. Dolly saw her face looking back at her. Except it was strange. She had a plastic reflection with painted eyes and painted lips.

Dolly thought again. Why was that strange? Didn't she always have a plastic body? And then she realized that no, she did not. She used to have a very different body. A person's body that wasn't painted or molded at all. It continued to confuse the toy why she had these memories, and why she had a different body. But the face she saw in the mirror was a plastic one, and that was strange to Dolly at the time.

It must have been an optical illusion. Mirror's show things how they are, unless someone has made them cheat. This one must have been cheating, and Dolly wanted to know how. She pressed her face closer to the box and the mirrored back, tilting and turning the cardboard so she could look at different angles of herself.

She remembered a sinking feeling in her stomach. A sense of confusion and panic started to overtake Dolly. She couldn't describe how but she began to feel different. Something cool had washed over her body, and made it so hard to move. It locked her elbows at angles and her feet rose to be on tippy toes. It pushed her breasts out in front of her, and cinched her waist until she couldn't breathe anymore.

Dolly was panicking for real now. She wasn't Dolly, she remembered. Not always. She was . . . she was . . . she couldn't remember her old name! She was a person, not long ago. But the strange mirror in the strange box changed her.

She was naked, for a time, her plastic body stripped of its plain clothing. Not that she had anything

more to hide. Dolly's body was smooth and curvy but not detailed. She was flush with embarrassment, and she hoped no one could see her, not naked and not like this. Dolly was becoming a toy in a toy store, and realized that some kid might see her and want to play with her. Or worse, buy her.

Dolly imagined herself as some toy of some kid. Imagined that she had no way to do anything on her own, her whole life owned by someone else. She would be just an object, posed on a shelf, lost in a box, or sold at garage sales. On and on, passing from one child to another. She would make them happy. And that made her happy. Her jittering stomach stopped jittering and her panic washed away with happy thoughts.

She didn't fret or worry as she shrank smaller and smaller, while the shelves grew into the air. Dolly was overjoyed when her clothing reappeared more exciting than it had been. White plastic boots that came up to her calves, with sharp heels to help keep her standing. Blue tights went all the way up her molded legs, and a wavy skirt of blue and white wrapped around her waist. Her top was simple and white, baring her midriff and showing off her breasts with sleeves that came just past her elbows. Sparkling white earrings clipped onto her plastic ears, and her hair made her look like some kind of rockstar with long bangs obscuring one eye.

Dolly fell on her back on the red carpet ground, smiling up at the ceiling and wanting to do nothing. She wanted to be a doll, a thing made to be played with. She didn't own herself anymore, didn't get to tell herself what to do. Why would she ever want to do that?

An old man trodded into Dolly's vision, and when he reached her, he looked down at her with a scowl. His hair was scraggly and pale white, his body lanky tall. He wore corduroy pants that went out of style in the 70s, and a red button down shirt uniform of Ye Olde Toys.

"Another one?" He said with a cracked voice. "Another one!"

He bent down and wrapped his bony fingers around Dolly, gripping her tightly around her plastic waist, and then hefted her into the air. Dolly looked into weathered gray eyes lined by wrinkles and crow's feet.

"Why must you toys," he said, shaking her, "insist on coming here?"

Dolly had no answer for the man. She didn't understand why he was so angry. All she wanted to do was to be bought and be someone's toy.

The man pressed Dolly almost up to his face, and he stared at her intently, old eyes looking for something, "Eh? Not one of the talky ones? Good. That means I don't have to hear you whine and cry about 'how I used to be huuuman. You can't seeell meee.' Wah, wah, wah." He said in a mock feminine tone.

The world tilted again as the man bent and picked up the pink box Dolly had investigated. "The truth is," the scarecrow continued, "that you become a toy in my store and I own you. I get to sell you."

That sounded about right to Dolly, whose mind was fading into happy thoughts as she stared uncontrollably into the distance. He tied twist ties around her wrists and waist, and then folded up cardboard over her feet to strap her to a backer board. It all seemed very complicated to Dolly, and she didn't understand why this was done. The scarecrow man did not say. He merely kept at his work and slid Dolly and the cardboard she had been strapped to inside the box that had first caught her attention.

The old man looked at Dolly, and his deep scowl turned to a barely there smile. "Not more than twenty dollars for you," he said and then he put her on the toy store shelf where Dolly had first seen the strange, empty box. The same box she was now stuck inside. The same box where she would live until she was purchased.

In the meantime, she watched people play and gawk at the store's toys, all the while wishing and waiting for her turn to be played with.