

Toy Chest Treasure

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A Ye Olde Toys Story

Maria began her shift the same way she did every day: by opening up a thin brown journal. She had filled the book with names and pictures of dolls, marionettes, and other assorted toys. Maria left brief descriptions for each one. Notes such as, “looking for love, sell to a Ken,” next to a Barbie dressed in pink, and “BFF, sell together,” next to a set of colorful rag dolls. That one had a check mark next to it.

And though the toys in the journal came in a multitude of shapes and sizes, they shared one trait that no one outside the store would know. Each of these dolls had once been people. And Maria intended that each of these wonderful toys deserved wonderful new homes. So she started each day reviewing what to look for in new owners for these dolls.

As she finished her ritual, Maria looked up and saw a perfect someone walk into the store. Not an owner, she knew instinctively, but a wonderful new doll who had yet to realize what she really was.

Jules moved down the mall concourse, almost power walking in her black flats that were her one pair of non-work shoes. Jules wasn't in a hurry, she just walked fast naturally and dove around dawdlers who chatted or ate while they enjoyed the mall sights. But Jules wasn't here to see the decorations, or eat, she was here to buy . . . something. Something that escaped her mind at the moment. But the woman was sure she would know it when

she saw it.

Jules's phone buzzed as she maneuvered around a three person family, almost tripped over the running girl, and only stopped moving when she read the bad news on the phone's screen: "Hit a snag. We need you ASAP." Jules slumped; Another night gone. Still, she could shop fast and get back to work . . .

Jules looked up and went wide-eyed at the store she was in. Instead of the Brookstone she had intended, Jules stood in the middle of a bright toy store. The shelves and front desk were cut from dark brown wood and images of toys carved on their faces. The red carpeting gave a regal tone to the simple store, and the toys themselves were old, new, and everything in between. The shop was quiet tonight, most customers having been scared away by the threat of storms, and Jules was one of four customers in the store. A woman sat behind the counter, head on her hands, watching the shop.

"Need help?" she asked Jules, who shook her head in response. With the matter dropped, Jules started walking again. But instead of leaving the store, she went deeper inside, which was strange, since Jules had long grown out of toy stores and the toys inside. She thought collecting them a waste, and playing with them childish. Not that Jules went out of her way to be very adult, but she had forgotten the simple joys of play.

She turned to her right, walking down the main aisle away from the counter and registers, and saw a large display centered on an oak toy chest. The mural on this chest showed the silhouette of Peter Pan with his sword held out in front of his body and leg behind. "Adventure Awaits!" the display proclaimed in raised letters. The toys on the top of the heap lived up to that bold statement. Superheroes in colorful cloth, pirates with surly stitched grins, and knights in plastic armor looked back at Jules. After taking a look at the toys near the top of the box, she decided to dig inside to see what she might find.

Jules knelt and drove her left arm deep into the packed box, reached to the bottom and began to feel for something interesting. She squeezed plush arms and brushed feathery accessories, but her fingers found nothing. Jules shook her head and wondered what she was doing. She was an adult, digging through a toy box for . . .

what, exactly? A toy she just wouldn't know what to do with anymore?

She sighed and pulled her arm out of the box. What had gotten into her? Jules pushed her brown hair out of her eyes and thought about what might have happened at work. That's when she noticed her hand. The hand that had gone into the toy box came back out covered in a long cloth glove.

Jules couldn't understand how she had slid perfectly into a glove. Why was there even a glove in the box full of toys? She tried, and failed to pull it off her skin. She pulled the gloved hand and a twinge shot up her arm, like she was pulling on her own body. And she was, because the tan glove was woven into her skin. She wasn't wearing a glove at all, Jules realized, her skin had turned to cloth.

The woman tried to stand up, but her legs wobbled as a tickling sensation ran through them. When she fell, Jules saw her skinny jeans melt away, exposing long cloth legs. Though round and shapely, there was an undeniable softness to her legs, like they were bursting with stuffing. Stranger still was that the cloth of her legs developed stripes, alternating white and tan, and her shoes disappeared altogether, leaving her in striped stocking feet. They were round and stuffing full, making her ankles difficult to see.

"The hell is this?" Jules said, forcing herself up and finding balance on plush legs. She took a step. And another. But she didn't go anywhere because her body began to shrink, and each step barely overcame the distance she had lost since the process began. Finally, realizing she couldn't get anywhere, Jules stopped. She rubbed her head with her plush hand, wondering what to do, wondering how to stop this while her body continued to betray her.

She squirmed at the tickling sensation coming from all across her torso. Her chest shifted around, her breasts squishing together, leaving her with a uniboob. Jules' body curved beautifully down to her waist and out once again with her hips; Then a spot of green cloth appeared at the center of her black shirt and spread out from there. Her blouse changed shape, with the sleeves and neckline receding, stopping just above her stuffing breasts. It was terribly short with a ruffled skirt and flowers decorating here and there. Then, two pairs of wings

blossomed from her back, green and mesh with wires creating their delicate shape.

The cloth that was now her skin continued to weave upward, surrounding her neck. It had a rhythmic movement that tickled Jules. She quivered as it moved up onto her face and she closed her eyes. Her mouth pulled into a bright, doll smile. Rows of stitches replaced her eyebrows. Her hair turned black and fell in a long braided ponytail made of cloth and stuffed like the rest of her.

Jules held her breath; a strange thing to do when you don't have lungs. She opened her eyes and braved to look at her new body. She still had five working fingers, all the correct proportions. Her body was softened by the stuffing, and the dress and tights were sewn into her. And she couldn't forget her new wings, which she couldn't get to flap. She pulled at the fabric that made up her fingers again and felt a pain from the stitches all the way along her arm.

"But daaaad, I don't want a Barbie. They're all pink and girly and stuff," A girl said nearby. Now that she was a toy, Jules was chilled at the thought of a child seeing her. She backed away from the voice and ran to hide next to the now towering toy box that had first changed her.

"Mel, honey, what's wrong with a Barbie doll?"

"Mom says they warp my self-image and impose stifling gender roles on kids."

Jules blinked her cloth eyes at what she had just heard.

The father sighed, "Honey, do you even know what that means?"

"It means Barbies are dumb and I don't want one!" The girl cried, and then came running around the corner. Jules froze where she stood and looked up at the towering child, amazed and frightened. The girl had short brown hair and a tomboy pair of overalls and t-shirt.

Jules stayed perfectly still and hoped to not to attract the attention of the giant. But the child's eyes sought out the best toy in the store. The giant, colorful letters on the toy box attracted her just as they had Jules, and the toy backed away so she would be harder to see. She pushed her plush body against the box as arms larger

than her whole body moved through the display. Jules had the odd sensation of her plush heart beating faster.

Soft steps came to the display box as a pair of black ballet flats and jeans walked to the girl. And high above, a freckled woman in a red apron attended the child.

“Is there a particular doll you’re looking for?” She asked.

Jules couldn’t see the girl from her vantage point, but heard her clear as day, “I dunno. My dad wants to get me a Barbie, but I think they are too girly.”

The employee nodded and knelt next to the girl. She turned and looked down, her body tilted so she could see around the edge of the box. Jules gazed into the woman’s twinkling eyes. The woman smiled at her. A knowing smile, one that revealed that she knew that the fairy doll had once been human.

“Have you looked over here?” She said, pointing to the cubby where Jules was hiding, “sometimes the best toys fall out of the box.”

Jules’ stitched mouth fell open. The woman knew, and didn’t care. No, that wasn’t right. The woman wanted to sell Jules. Sell her like she was just a simple, common rag doll. And as the girl looked over the edge of the box, Jules had no choice. She bolted like a mouse, having nowhere to go but out into the open.

Her tiny plush legs carried her out in front of the display and Jules made a break toward the long aisles and their hopefully deep shelves. Maybe, if she could get behind the other dolls, she could hide, and maybe she would not be bought. But the little girl appeared in front of her, and knelt down to catch the running doll.

Jules started to backpedal, but her stuffed cloth feet simply couldn’t respond in time. She fell on her back and slid right into giant, waiting hands. Fingers coiled around Jules, pushing the stuffing in her abdomen out of place. Sealing her fate as a simple toy.

Jules was picked up and raised so she could stare into the brown irises of her first and future owner, and she saw the excitement in them.

“Do you like her?” The employee asked.

“I love her,” The girl said, her voice in breathless awe and eyes large in wonderment. Jules wrapped her cloth hands around the girl’s giant hand. A part of her -- most of her -- didn’t want to be owned or be a doll. But she realized a part of her was ready to let go of the trials and tribulations of life. The late texts to get back to work for a job that didn’t pay enough. And as she was held by this giant eight year old girl, Jules felt more and more okay about being a doll.

In a flash, Jules saw her new life with this girl. She saw that she would be played with and held close for months and years to come. She would see the world anew again through young eyes. She saw battles with pirate toys, races with stuffed tigers, and expeditions into the woods. Jules even saw her the times when she was put away in cardboard boxes and dusty attics. But those didn’t scare her, because Jules knew there would always be another owner on the other side of the boxes.

And once she saw this, the stitched smile on Jules’s cloth face was real. Her fear floated away and she relaxed in her owner’s hand. The girl who would be her first owner spun around and ran back to her father, waving Jules like a flag in the wind.

“Lookit what I found!”