

People Watching, Toy Shopping

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“I need to transform someone,” Phoebe said in the same way she might say she needed new shoes. Plainly, but with a glint of wanting in her eye. She wore her long black hair, put dark makeup around her eyes, and rich black lipstick on her lips. Her clothes tended to show more colors, like today’s purple dress and black tights. But Phoebe’s aura of darkness around her was fake; she squeed at cute things and swooned over Legolas just as much as most girls.

Donna coughed and almost spit out her latte when she heard her best friends’ comment. “Aren’t your witchy powers supposed to be a secret?”

Phoebe shrugged, “Eh.” She leaned back in her chair at the food court. A hum of talking filled the concourse, which was only a quarter full this Wednesday night. Pedestrians and shoppers strolled through the walkway at their own pace, and salespeople looked bored at their kiosks.

“Is there a reason you need to magically toy with someone’s body and change their lives forever?” Donna asked. She was a tall and comfortable girl, keeping her red hair simple, straight, and shoulder-length. A tomboy most of her life, Donna had recently been acquainted with the joys of makeup and skirts.

The witch flexed the fingers, feeling an almost electric sensation buzzing in her hand. She focused on that power, willing more energy into her palm. Her fingers tingled and just when they began to hurt the magical

circuit closed. The air in her hand popped and glinting pieces of pixie dust fell to the table. “I’m so boooooored. The last person I transformed was that guy I turned into a ballerina last year.”

“I can’t thank you enough for the ballerina thing, by the way.” Donna sighed, “she looked so sexy in those leotards.”

“You’re welcome. I thought you and Elise made a great couple, for the record.”

Donna nodded, took a sip of her coffee, and looked out to the concourse. “So, who do you want to transform? And, more importantly, into what?”

“I’m thinking toys.” Phoebe nodded, “Definitely toys.”

“Using your powers for fun instead of evil?”

“Exactly!”

Donna looked out to a flock of girls hanging out in front of a shoe store. She sensed they were cheerleaders by their too-large smiles and light laughs, their tight, athletic bodies, and the little ribbons they put in their hair. “I vote for them.” Donna motioned to the girls, and Phoebe cocked her eyebrow.

“I could see it. A little wind up toy,” she smiled as she looked at a particularly short girl with curly blonde hair. She talked with her hands, her gestures enrapturing her friends. Ideas swirled in the witch’s mind. “I think she would make a wonderful little beer maid. I’d put her in an orange dirndl dress and clog shoes. And she would have steins of beer stuck to her hands.”

“A windup?” Donna asked.

“Yeah,” Phoebe said, “with a big mechanical key. Wind her up and she goes marching and serving her little beers. Or she’ll just walk into a wall and fall down, but her little wind up body will just keep moving.”

Donna laughed. “I want one. What about the others?”

“I’m . . . not sure. It’ll be hard to get one to separate from the flock, and I don’t think I could zap them all. Two, maybe. But not all of them.”

Donna frowned, her vision of a little cheerleader collection vanishing. “What if you transform one, and let the others play with her?”

Phoebe’s eyes lit up. “Oh, that idea has some merit, but I see another target.” She half turned to her left and pointed to a girl sitting three tables down, who sipped from her coffee and kept her focus entirely on the book in her hands. The girl had a quiet sort of face and her long black hair looked more like a hood. The book she read had some sort of colorful fantasy character on the cover.

“I think she’s an action figure,” Donna said.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, I think she likes to live out the fantasies she reads in her books. I think she would make a fantastic elf warrior or something so she could go on adventures in the woods.”

Donna’s imagination started up and she saw the toy the girl could be, “Put her in greens and browns with Robin Hood tights and pointy ears and give her a plastic bow.”

“And a button on her back!” Phoebe said excitedly, “When you press it, she says her catchphrase, ‘For Honor! Hod Altria!’ Unfortunately, I think she would end up on some collector’s shelf instead of adventuring.”

“Alas, poor toy,” Donna said, who then motioned to a nearby kiosk and the girl sitting there. “She’s a good candidate, too.”

Phoebe turned to the kiosk selling ridiculous slippers shaped like oversized, plush sneakers. The very bored brunette who worked there texted on her phone and ignored the few people who were interested in the slippers. The girl looked entirely not the type to be working at all. Her blouse and skirt looked designer, and her hair had professionally styled curls and streaks of red, and she wore top of the line strappy sandals.

“Rag doll,” Phoebe said with a quick appraisal, and Donna nodded.

“Make her wear one of those slippers. She would be so cute.”

“Mitten hands, yarn hair. A jumper and a permanent threaded smile.”

“Oooohhh, too cute.” Donna said, “So soft you can just hug her for hours and hours, and all floppy and fun to bounce around.”

“She would be a great tea time partner, too.”

Donna nodded, “So A, B, or C?” She asked.

“There’s also D.” The witch replied, pointing at Donna.

“Me?” Donna’s voice went shrill.

“You do have Barbie’s height, if not her fashion. But I can help with that.”

“You wouldn’t,” Donna said, leaning back and waving off her best friend’s threat. “I know every boy you kissed and every person you enchanted. There are people who would love that information.”

Phoebe’s hand fell below the table. “You assume much, mere mortal. First, that people will believe you. Second, that you will ever be human again.”

“Psshhh. We’ve known each other since second grade. You love me too much to change me forever.” Donna turned back to the cheerleaders, “Now, I think . . . that . . .” she stopped talking and started noticing a tingling sensation across her abdomen. Donna looked at Phoebe with moon sized eyes. “You already started it, didn’t you?”

Phoebe cackled like the witch she was, “I was wondering when you would notice.”

Donna’s body continued to tingle, and her stomach twisted. The skin on her abdomen was already tough and hollow. She pulled up her shirt and gasped at her new, thin waist, impossibly for any normal girl, but par for the course for a Barbie.

All at once her body heaved and Donna sucked in air, the molding plastic of her shifting body hardening and thinning out. She was empty, as all the weight of her bones and muscles had vanished. The constant, familiar heartbeat she had all her life had vanished. Yet, here she was, still alive and feeling.

Donna’s legs grew out and straightened, like someone pumping air into a balloon. Her feet arched and

ankles locked in a tip toe position that required high heeled shoes. The half-doll Donna shot her arm out at her witch friend, and was startled by the squeak of plastic moving along plastic. She simply forgot what she was about to say when her elbow cocked and fingers merged into a molded plastic hand.

“What are you going to do with me?” Donna asked, her voice dull and resigned to her Barbie fate.

“I’m sure there are some great kids who need a new doll.”

“I know what kids - boys *and* girls - do to Barbies. I want no part of that. Put me in a display case or something.”

“Tsk Tsk,” Phoebe said, “owners decide what to do with their dolls, not the other way around. Don’t worry, though, you’ll figure it out.”

The changes swept up Donna’s face, reforming her mouth into a too-wide pink smile. Her eyes turned to plastic, but kept their soulful glow. Her hair turned to synthetic red plastic strands. Donna could only imagine the horrors that children could bring upon her hair.

And then, as a coupe-de-grace, tension built in Donna’s chest, a force pushing against her new plastic skin. Something wanting to escape. She had just enough time, and just enough will, to watch breasts burst from her comfortable A cup to Barbie’s absurd proportions.

“No wonder girls have such image issues.” Phoebe tsked again. Donna agreed, but could not move her plastic mouth to say as much, and so kept her eyes on her shiny plastic breasts. But choice wasn’t something she had anymore, her movement now gone along with the rest of her true body.

“Wardrobe is next.” Phoebe said, cracking her knuckles. Donna mentally slumped. “I’ve always wanted to see you in a real dress.”

A wave of sparkles carried over Barbie, burying themselves in her clothes. She could barely make out the way everything changed. The way her jeans turned to thick Barbie tights, or her top grew longer and lost its sleeves, while also gaining a shiny maroon hue. Her comfortable flat sandals left her, too, replaced by plastic heels

that fit her molded feet perfectly.

And then the world got bigger. That's how Donna saw it because the opposite was too much to comprehend. Phoebe waved as the doll's head shrank below the table. Donna tilted backward, her topheavy torso and hair overcoming the weight of her long and thin legs, and she fell backward.

Her view now blocked by her plastic Barbie legs, Donna never saw Phoebe's hand until it wrapped around her doll body. She felt fiery warm to Barbie Donna, a sign that the doll had lost the heat of her true body.

"Oooooohhh, you're too cute, Donna!" Phoebe told the doll, who for most of her life did not like the word cute when applied to her. "Here, let me take a picture."

Phoebe placed Donna on the table, pushing her doll legs down so she could stand at her almost one foot height. Then the witch pulled out her magical iPhone to snap a quick picture. "This is so going on your Facebook."

Donna winced, and wanted to tackle Phoebe and take away her toy. Alas, her body never moved.

"Well, Phoebe, this is where we part ways. I'll see you in two weeks."

Wait! Don't just leave me here! Donna shouted, hoping her friend left her some kind of telepathy. If she did, Phoebe did not react to it. *What's going to happen to me?* The doll asked, watching the raven haired witch walk away.

That's when Donna noticed a small girl looking at her with greedy eyes.