

Timeout in Toyland

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“Open your door, Pig! I need to talk to you,” Kevin said as he pounded on Rose’s bedroom door, breaking the previous unnatural quiet in the house. Henry, a tall boy with wavy blonde hair and glasses, stood next to Kevin, watching his friend with concern. He held a panda teddy against his body, wearing gloves and being very careful not to let the bear touch his exposed skin.

Rose shouted back at her brother’s audio intrusion through the door. “What, jerk?”

“Come here!” Kevin pounded on the door once again, “I found one of your stupid toys.”

Henry leaned in and whispered. “Are you sure about this? She’s your sister, dude.”

Kevin looked at his friend with disbelieving eyes and a gaping mouth. “Dude, after all the shit and rumors she keeps telling about us -- and making the entire school believe? You really want to back out?” Kevin glanced at the panda bear inches from the skin on his arm, and he jumped back as if his friend was holding a poisonous snake. “Dude, watch where you put that thing!”

Rose finally opened her door with a rush of wind, “Goaway!” She shouted. Though she was a few years younger than Kevin, Rose stood almost as tall as him. And while their faces bore obvious similarities, Kevin’s black hair and Rose’s brown made them appear shockingly different.

“I found your stupid bear,” Kevin said, nudging Henry. The other boy held the black and white teddy out for Rose to take. She looked at it, narrowed her eyes, then looked at Henry, and narrowed them again, and then stared at Kevin.

“That’s not mine,” she said.

“Of course it’s yours, you flesh eating disease. What, do you think it’s mine? It’s a shitty bear.” Kevin saw his sister’s mind piecing together the strange puzzle pieces around her.

Henry held out the bear and made it dance for Rose, a short and failed smile on his face.

“Dude. . .” Kevin said.

“What? It’s cute.” Henry replied. “I’m Rose’s bear.” He said in a dopey voice. He made the little panda clap its paws. Feeling childish for it, but Henry started to win her over. But she wasn’t about to let Kevin see her smile.

“Ugh, you two really are gay for each other.” She said to mash her frown back into place. Kevin turned to Rose, his face already tomato red, when she grabbed the teddy by its head and yanked it from Henry’s gloved hands. “Now goaway!” She started to slam the door, but her body stopped in mid motion.

A long, terrible smile crept across Kevin’s face. He pushed the door back open and stepped into his sister’s terrible room of high school heartthrobs and faerie lights. She didn’t stop him; she couldn’t. Her eyes stared past him, past the hallway wall, out a thousand yards, her brown eyes large and empty.

She held onto the bear with a deathgrip as her right hand and arm began to sprout shiny black fur. The right half of her t-shirt began sympathy changes, growing its own layer of short white fur with an extra soft fringe along its hem. The sleeves and top melted into Rose’s skin, and became more like a dress. A furry white dress with a puffball black tail.

“What. Did. You. Do?” Rose asked, fighting for control over her body, her mouth, her eyes. But her brother just laughed.

“This is for a decade and a half of crap I’ve had to put up with.” He said, starting to walk around his frozen sister.

He could have told her about the mystical book full of crazy spells that were actually real. He could have told her about testing the spells, and succeeding. He could have told her about their first attempt at this enchantment; about the ragdoll they had first picked out. But he thought it was best just to let her mind make up its own stories. It was more fun to watch Rose squirm.

Her fingers merged together into a single oversized mitten paw that came with three harmless felt claws. The furry fabric of her glove gave way to black nylon just above her elbow. The cool, stretchy fabric extended across the top of her chest, and began to change her other arm to match her new plushiness.

A similar dance was happening to Rose’s legs, as the top of her jeans tightened and changed into nylon tights and long fuzzy black boots that had matching claws and oversized panda feet.

“I haven’t figured out what I’m going to do to you. Mom and Dad are gone for the weekend, so I don’t have to turn you back . . . well, I don’t actually have to turn you back at all,” Kevin said with a rueful smile. “I guess I could play with you. Make you do whatever I want.”

“So. So. Gay.” Rose managed to get out.

“Or I could give you away to Goodwill!” Kevin shouted into her ear, and Rose smiled. Despite everything, it was good to know that she could still get under her brother’s skin.

“Dude, really?” Henry asked, “Goodwill?” He turned to Rose. “This is temporary,” he said. She gave the blonde a short smile. “You’re. Too good. For him.” She told Henry, falling a little into his blue eyes.

“Henry, don’t undermine me when I’m trying to scare my sister.”

Rose started to feel the spell lifting. The transformation was ending and the final changes began to sweep over her face. A red bow tightened around her neck, and ticklish brush bristles swept up her face, leaving her skin a mask of soft cloth, all white apart from the large black spots around her eyes. Black thread was stitched

into her nose and down to her mouth; a cute panda nose and mouth. Her already short hair turned white, and tufty round ears unfurled on the top of her head.

Rose looked down at her strange new body, and took one paw-hand and poked her plush belly. The stuffing she was now made from gave way. She looked up to her brother with still disbelieving plastic eyes, and then chucked the panda teddy that had done all this at him.

“Is that all you got! I’m just as big and just as . . .” She stopped when her body involuntarily shuddered. Kevin laughed. Rose braced herself as if the ground was shaking. It happened again, and had to look up when she looked at Kevin. Her cloth mouth fell open as it happened a third time and this time took Rose all the way to doll height, no bigger than the plush toy that had gotten her into this mess. The world was at once an alien place to her, one that made furniture into buildings.

Kevin loomed over her, a complete giant to her doll self. Rose realized just moments too late that it would have been a very good idea to hide from such an angry giant. But still in shock, she didn’t do anything until after her brother grabbed her plush body, squeezing her stuffing in a way that would have suffocated a human, but did no harm to a plush teddy.

“So what now, big brother? Are you gonna play with me?” She pretended that everything was fine. That she wasn’t suddenly at every whim to her brother. That she wasn’t a doll and he wasn’t a giant. That she wasn’t scared out of her mind. “I think I still have my old doll tea set! We could have . . .”

“Shut it, Rose. I own you now. You’re just a pathetic doll. A little toy that I can do whatever I want to. I can play with you, hide you in the attic, give you away to Goodwill, or sell you to someone on the other side of the world.” His words were harsh, bold, and terrifyingly true. Rose saw that in his eyes. “I was going to turn you back. I really was. But now that I’m holding you, I realize how much better it will be for everyone if you stay just the way you are.”

The little doll had no choice but to keep her happy face on, but looked over to Henry, hoping that . . . Henry was gone. Sometime in the middle of her transformation, the blonde boy had slipped out of her room and neither she nor Kevin had noticed.

And then she looked back to her brother, and something in him had changed in the span of moments. He wasn't angry, or insane, or even happy. He just looked . . . blank. He let go of Rose and she fell what seemed like a mile to the ground. She saw Henry on her way down, standing behind Kevin. And he held a doll against Kevin's arm. The doll that they had first tested the spell on. The one they thought had failed.

The panda doll hit the ground and looked at her brother. He didn't have gross, hairy legs anymore. Instead, his legs were wrapped in pink and blue striped tights, and were softer and plusher than they had been. His shoes morphed into cloth sneakers, oversized and neon to match the wild colors of his rapidly transforming body, while his shorts bloomed into a carousel skirt.

"Dude," Kevin said, trying to turn his head to look at Henry. "What. The. Hell."

"You needed a time out. Seriously." Henry replied.

The changes kept coming, turning Kevin more and more into a doll. And, more embarrassingly, more into a girl wearing a bright yellow dress with poofy sleeves, his skin turned to soft cotton, his fingers fusing into a doll mitten. He developed plush toy boobs that he managed to touch, mesmerized by his newfound femininity. His hair grew out, long and pink, made from cloth like the rest of him.

Kevin's face softened, his mouth turning into a happy smile instead of a creepy, insane one, enhanced by cute pink lipstick. His chin tucked in, his eyes grew brighter and more colorful from the appearance of eye shadow. And then perfect pink circles blossomed on his cheeks. He was the spitting image of a rag doll.

The transformation stopped, and Kevin spun around almost like a ballerina to face his former friend. He swung his plush hand, and Henry let it connect.

“That’s fair,” Henry said, “But you seriously needed to be calmed down. She’s your sister, dude. The only reason I agreed to this is because you agreed to turn her back after a few days.”

Kevin said nothing, he was trying to look Henry eye to eye when his body shuddered. Rose started to clap her paw hands. “Shrink! Shrink! Shrink!” She chanted. Kevin’s body shuddered again and he was half his normal height.

“Please don’t leave me with her,” Kevin said, moments before the third and final time his body shuddered. He turned around slowly, to look at his panda sister eye to eye. She had her paws up covering her mouth and the wild grin on her face.

“You’re adooooorable.” She said, drawing out the second word and making it so much worse for him. “I always wanted a sister instead of a big, dumb ape. I guess you’ll do.”