

The Gift

A frigid gush of air spiraled through the shop, blooming an excited awakening for my first day on display. My maker had put me on the highest chair, sitting proudly in front of the foggy glass looking out onto the street. My smile tightly pulled at my cheek after an hour, yet no matter how hard I tried I just couldn't get rid of it.

The bell jingled merrily as more and more people crowded the shop, but no one gave me a second look. Still I waited hopefully, staring down at my meticulously carved hands, intimately etched features, and perfectly strung wires that put me together. I was nothing like the red and blue steaming train set, or flowery knitted dolls. I wasn't some cantankerous clunky army tank that a child wants, or a book to entertain with. I was plain and ugly. If anyone had even taken the time to look at me, or even cast a second glance I might have thought otherwise, but I was miserably marginalized.

My pride waned into melancholy. As darkness crept into night, days creeping into weeks, I got pushed into the bottom of the discount bin. All I could think about was my very first day on the shelves. Bliss glistened on my hard wooden eyes until the snowball of realization came crashing down on me. The utter horror of being unloved and unwanted was too much, as I crushed into a state of despair and loneliness.

It was a misty Sunday morning when I awoke with a jolt to see a fatigued woman rummaging through the discount bin where I was sleeping. She was picking up other faulty or broken toys and laying them aside, contemplating them over each other. Then she saw me. Picking me up shakily, she studied my features, my looks, my plainness. "Beautiful," she breathed, looking at my jacket, shoes, hair and hands. Confidently taking me to the counter, she bought me without hesitation. Walking me out onto the street I'd so mournfully watched for hours, waiting for someone to pick me, she put me into a car and drove off.

After waiting what felt like a year of suspense, she brought me into a hospital, creaking a door open onto a small ward with a sleeping boy. His eyes slowly fluttered open, the dark grey bags under his eyes contrasting against his pale chalky face. He pulled himself up, tired excitement creasing his face as his mother pulled the gift out of her bag. "I know it's not much, but..." she handed me over, his weak hands holding me and his face lighting up with ecstasy. "I knew you couldn't play with a train or tank set," she said earnestly, glancing at his legs which had crippled due to a prior accident, "So I thought a puppet would be perfect." He looked at her, and then me, smiling radiantly. "It is."

By Isabelle Sutherland