

## The Doll Who Didn't Want to be a Christmas Present

The toys who were left on the shelves stood or sat up straight and smiled their most appealing smiles.

"We don't have much time left! The store will close soon," said the toy train engine. "I better polish my windows and wheels again, so I'll be noticed."

"I'd better comb my curls one more time," said a pretty doll.

"Yes, we all need to tidy up," agreed a shiny toy airplane.

"You can do all the polishing, combing, and tidying up you want, but *I* will just keep hiding behind *you* elephant," declared a little cloth doll.

"Why don't you want to be chosen?" asked the elephant. "It's the greatest of all honors for a toy to be chosen as a Christmas present for a child."

"No, it isn't!" insisted the doll, as she stamped her little foot. "I *never* want to be a present on Christmas or any other day!" With that, she pulled the corners of her mouth down and frowned, trying to look as awful as it is possible for a little doll to look.

You see, one time a boy had pulled her button eyes until one came off. The saleslady had sewn it back on, but she always saw cross-eyed after that. Sometime later, another boy snatched her off the shelf and threw her high in the air. She fell to the floor and was bruised badly. Not long after that, a girl had pulled her yarn hair so hard that a few strands came painfully out. Because of these incidents, she had no desire to become anyone's Christmas, birthday, or any other gift, whatsoever.

Suddenly, the door opened, and in a swirl of snowflakes stepped a small woman with grey hair and a lovely set of wrinkles, forming a sweet smile on her face. "May I help you ma'am?" inquired the saleslady.

"Yes, please. I need gifts for all my grandchildren, all twelve of them." The little cloth doll whisked herself behind the elephant. She carefully and quietly stacked blocks behind him to make her hideaway even more secure. The grandmother of a dozen, quickly selected a gift for each child with an experienced eye and hand.

"Thank you dear," said the elder lady.

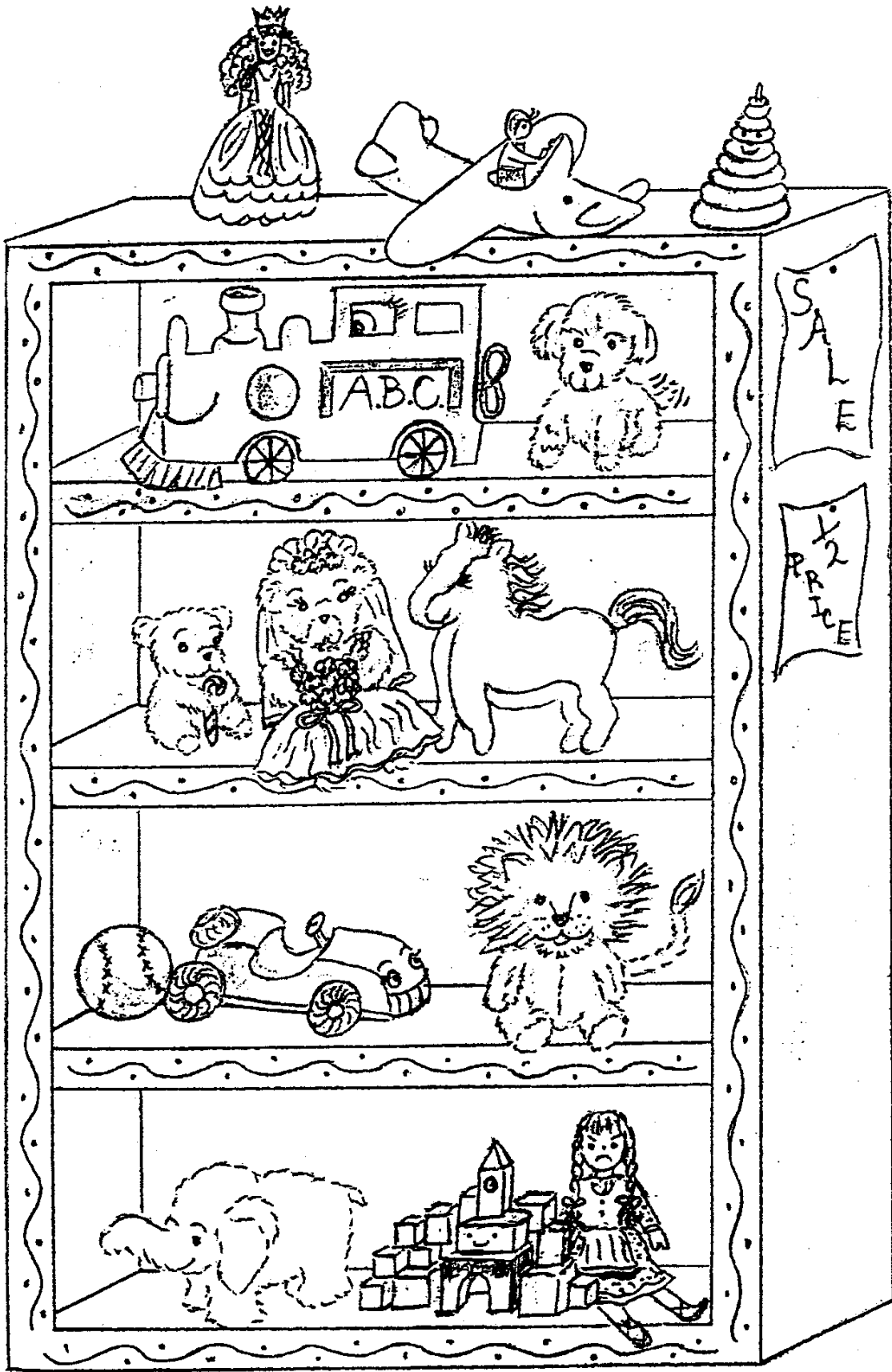
"You're welcome, ma'am," the young lady replied. "Here are your packages." They exchanged "Merry Christmases" as the door opened and closed again in another swirling of soft snowflakes.

The shelves were now close to bare. The little cloth doll gave a sigh of relief as the saleslady put her coat on and went to hang the "Closed" sign on the door. The cloth doll nestled down among the blocks contentedly. However, in the next instant, she heard a tap-tapping sound and then the swishing sound of the door swinging open. Then there was the low voice of a man.

"Thanks so much," it said. "I know you're closing, but I had to work late and must get a gift for my little girl."

"There's not much left sir, just a few stuffed animals and dolls," the saleslady said.

The man eyed each toy hastily. As he reached for a doll from the top shelf, he heard a slight noise coming from the bottom shelf. Curious about the sound, he leaned over,



moved the elephant aside, and there was the little cloth doll huddled behind the blocks. Her face was twisted into the most menacing expression she could fashion. However, the man was in such a hurry, he did not notice.

"She's perfect for my little girl. She said she wanted a rag doll. Could you wrap her for me?" he asked.

"Certainly sir," the lady replied.

As the saleslady put her in the box, the doll screamed, "No, I won't go!" But because the man and woman had not understood toy language since they were children, the lid was fit on the box, it was wrapped in colorful paper and tied with a bow. "Help, let me out!" yelled the doll in a muffled voice.

"Here you are sir."

"Thank you," the man answered as he sped out the door.

Inside the box, the little doll was tilted this way and then that. She heard strange sounds that reminded her of the noises the toy cars made as they drove around the toy shelves. One time, when the box was jostled especially hard, her mouth was filled with dry tissue paper, but she continued to demand, "-et -e ou- o- -ere!"

After a while the box became very still and the doll heard the man say, "I can hardly wait to see her eyes in the morning."

Thinking he was talking about her, the doll thought, Then I'll close my eyes and keep 'em closed! After a while the warm silence comforted her, and she fell asleep in the soft darkness.

The doll awoke to the sound of delighted laughter. Her eyes blinked back bright morning sun, as the lid of the box was raised. "Oh Mommy, Daddy, come on downstairs! I love her! Thank you!"

As the cloth doll was lifted from the box, she screamed, "No! No, I *don't wanna* be a Christmas present! Leave me *alone!*" Stressing her point, she wrinkled her face into a threatening scowl.

"What's the matter? Why don't you want to be a present?"

"Oh, you speak toy language!"

"Of course!"

"I thought kids didn't speak our language anymore. I heard they only speak TV, and computer, an' other machine languages these days. Anyway, why're you being so nice to me?"

"Because you're wonderful!" exclaimed the little girl.

"How do *you* know? You don't know me! I'm just a rag doll!"

"Well I'm just five years old, but I think we could be friends."

"Hmm. Well . . . I suppose we could try."

"Do you like Christmas cookies for breakfast?"

The little doll scratched her head. Is it possible children can be kind? . . . Yes, she realized, as she studied the girl's face. . . . it's true! She smiled her sweetest smile and hugged her new friend. "So what kinda cookies do you have?"



