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## Toy Box

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# Toy Box

Roy Upton

It was still dark out as Wendy awoke. The garbage truck rumbled past on the street below. At first she was stiff and a little disoriented, then the pain returned. Wendy remembered the thud of his fist pummeling her repeatedly in a fit of drunken rage. Like it was her fault the neighborhood had changed. The plant had closed. Jobs had gone to Mexico and the Mexicans had taken over here. This was the third night this week she had sought refuge in the attic. Wendy could put a pillow and some blankets in the attic, but that would mean admitting to herself that there would be a next time.

Wendy looked around, still too sore to go down the ladder. That's when she saw it. Over in the corner, hidden in shadow and forgotten, the toy box. It's once bright colors faded just like her hopes and dreams. The pirate on the lid was supposed to be friendly but weathering and dust made it look shabby, mocking and a bit sinister. Wendy opened the box, partially to delay going down there and partially in hope of finding something that would remind her of a simpler time, a time when she was happy.

On top lay the ballerina doll. Its pristine white and cotton candy pink tutu made it look like a princess waiting for her prince. Wendy had been a dancer; she had been good, even auditioned for the Minneapolis troupe. She had been accepted, but that was before the accident. A failed catch while practicing. Wendy struck her head causing her to lose that fine sense of balance required to be a top ballerina. She eventually got over the heart ache but still suffered headaches. Wendy put the doll aside.

The next item was a wooden toy soldier. John, her high school sweetheart, had looked so handsome in his Marine Corps uniform. He was just like a modern day knight in shining armor at graduation. Before he shipped out John vowed when he got back they would get married; a sniper rendered him unable to keep that promise.

The cowboy doll reminded Wendy of Steve. Rough cut and wild, he had his fun with her. Then he rode off with nary a look back or pardon me ma'am. A week later she read he had wrapped his truck around a tree. The next month she was late.

Below her the sounds of stirring told her Bryan was starting to wake up as she contemplated the teddy bear. Bryan had been soft and cuddly at first, but even teddy bears have claws. Four months after the wedding she was six months pregnant. He said it did not matter, that all he wanted was her. Then he came home drunk. The first blow triggered a miscarriage; a neighbor from across the street had driven her to the emergency room. There would be no more babies.

Wendy was about to go down and start breakfast when she spotted the knife, Peter's knife. It had been buried at the bottom of the toy box for all these years. Peter her twin brother had drowned when they were ten, they had been inseparable until that day. Forever young Peter would be, and he was so proud of his knife. Wendy remembered wanting to put it in his coffin, she had searched everywhere but could not find it. It was still sharp. Clutching the hilt tightly, Wendy smiled.