

Toys Go Out:

Being the Adventures of a Knowledgeable Stingray, A Toughy Little Buffalo, and Someone Called Plastic

by Emily Jenkins

CHAPTER ONE

In the Backpack, Where It is Very Dark

SECTION 1

The backpack is dark and smells like a wet bathing suit.

Waking up inside, Lumphy feels cramped and grumped. “I wish I had been asked,” he moans. “If I had been asked, I would have said I wasn’t going.”

“Shh,” says StingRay, though she doesn’t like the dark backpack any more than Lumphy. “It’s not so bad if you don’t complain.”

“We weren’t told about this trip,” snorts Lumphy. “We were just packed in the night.”

“Why don’t you shut your buffalo mouth?” snaps StingRay. “Your buffalo mouth is far too whiny.”

There is a small nip on the end of her tail, and StingRay curls it away from Lumphy’s big square buffalo teeth.

Plastic usually hums when she is feeling nervous. “Um tum tum—um tum tum—tum—tiddle—tee,” she trills, to see if it will make the inside of the backpack seem any nicer.

“Don’t you know the words to that song?” asks Lumphy.

“There are no words. It’s a hum,” answers Plastic.

No one says anything for a while, after that.

“Does anyone know where we’re going in here?” wonders Lumphy.

Plastic does not.

StingRay doesn’t, either.

“My stomach is uncomfortable,” grumphs the buffalo. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

SECTION 2

Buh-buh bump! It feels like the backpack is going down some stairs. Or maybe up some stairs.

Or maybe up something worse than stairs.

StingRay tries to think calming thoughts. She pictures the high bed with the fluffy pillows where she usually sleeps. She pictures the Little Girl with the blue barrette, who scratches where the ears would be if StingRay had ears. But none of these thoughts makes her feel calm.

“I hope we’re not going to the vet,” StingRay says finally.

“What’s the vet?” asks Lumphy.

“The vet is a big human dressed in a white coat who puts animals in a contraption made from rubber bands, in order to see what is wrong with them,” answers StingRay, who sometimes says she knows things when she doesn’t. “Then he pokes them over and over.

with needles the size of carrots,
and makes them drink nasty-tasting medicine,
and puts them in the bumpity washing
machine to fix whatever’s broken.”

“If anyone needs to go to the vet, it’s the one-eared sheep,” says Plastic, remembering the oldest of the Little Girl’s toys. “And Sheep’s not even here. No, we can’t be going to the vet. We aren’t broken.”

“Speak for yourself,” snorts Lumphy, who feels even sicker than before at the thought of the bumpity washing machine.

SECTION 3

Woosh. Woosh. The backpack begins to swing.

Back and forth. Back and forth.

Or maybe round and round.

“I hope we’re not going to the zoo,” moans StingRay.

“They’ll put us in cages with no one to talk to. Each one in a separate cage,

and we’ll have to woosh back and forth all day,

and do tricks on giant swings,

with people throwing quarters at our faces,

and teasing.”

“I don’t think we’re big enough for the zoo,” Plastic says hopefully. “I’m pretty sure they’re only interested in very large animals over there.”

“I’m large,” says Lumphy.

“She means really, really, very large,” says StingRay. “At the zoo they have stingrays the size of choo-choo trains;

and plastics the size of swimming pools.

Zoo buffaloes would never fit in a backpack.

They eat backpacks for lunch, those

buffaloes.”

“Is that true?” asks Lumphy, but nobody answers him.

SECTION 4

Plunk! The backpack is thrown onto the ground.

Or maybe into a trash can.

Or onto a garbage truck.

“We might be going to the dump!” cries StingRay. “We’ll be tossed in a pile of old green beans,

and sour milk cartons,
because the Little Girl doesn't love us
anymore,
and it will be icy cold all the time,
and full of garbage-eating sharks,
and it will smell like throw-up."

"I don't think so," soothes Plastic.

"I'll be forced to sleep on a slimy bit of used paper baggie, instead of on the big high bed with the fluffy pillows!" continues StingRay.

There is a noise outside the backpack. Not a big noise, but a rumbling one. "Did you hear that?" asks StingRay. "I think it is the X-ray machine. The vet is going to X-ray us one by one

and look into our insides with an enormous
magnifying glass,
and then poke us with the giant carrot!"

"I'm sure it's not an X-ray," says Plastic calmly, although she isn't sure at all.
"An X-ray would be squeakier."

"Then I think it is a lion," cries StingRay. "A lion at the zoo who does not want to be on display with any small creatures like you and me.

A lion who doesn't like sharing her swing set,
and wants all the quarters for herself.
She is roaring because she hasn't had any lunch yet,
and her favorite food is stingrays."

"A lion would be fiercer," says Plastic, a bit uncertainly. "It would sound hungrier, I bet."

"Maybe it is a giant buffalo," suggests Lumphy.

“Maybe it is a dump truck!” squeals StingRay. “A big orange dump truck tipping out piles of rotten groceries on top of us,
and trapping us with the garbage-eating
sharks
and the throw-up smell!”

“Wouldn’t a dump truck be louder?” asks Plastic, though she is starting to think StingRay might have a point. “I’m sure it’s not a dump truck.”

SECTION 5

The backpack thumps down again with a bang. “I would like to be warned,” moans Lumphy. “Sudden bumps make everything worse than it already is.”

“The Girl doesn’t love us and she’s trying to get rid of us!” cries StingRay in a panic.

The backpack opens. The rumbly noise gets louder,
and the light is very bright—so bright that StingRay, Plastic, and Lumphy have to squinch up their eyes and take deep breaths before they can see where they are. A pair of warm arms takes them all out of the dark, wet-bathing-suit smell together.

The three toys look around. There are small chairs, a sunny window, and a circle of fidgety faces.

It is not the vet.

It is not the zoo.

It is not the dump. (They are pretty sure.)

But where it is?

The rumbly noise surges up. A grown-up asks everyone to Please Be Quiet Now.
And then comes a familiar voice.

“These are my best friends,” says the Little Girl who owns the backpack and sleeps in the high bed with the fluffy pillows. “My best friends in the world. That’s why I brought them to show-and-tell.”

“Welcome,” says the teacher.

Sticky, unfamiliar fingers pat Lumphy’s head and StingRay’s plush tail.

Plastic is held up for all to admire. “We are here to be shown and told,” she whispers to StingRay and Lumphy, feeling quite bouncy as she looks around at the schoolroom. “Not to be thrown away or put under the X-ray machine!”

The teacher says Lumphy looks a lot like a real buffalo. (Lumphy wonders what the teacher means by “real,” but he is too happy to worry much about it.)

“We’re special!” whispers StingRay. “We’re her best friends!”

“I knew it would be something nice,” says Plastic.

SECTION 6

Funny, but the ride home is not so uncomfortable. The smell is still there, but the backpack seems rather cozy. Plastic has herself a nap.

StingRay isn’t worried about vets and zoos and garbage dumps anymore; she curls herself into a ball by Lumphy’s buffalo stomach. “The Little Girl loves us,” she tells him. “I knew it all along, really. I just didn’t want to say.”

Lumphy licks StingRay’s head once, and settles down to wait. When he knows where he is going, traveling isn’t so bad. And right now, he is going home.