

Toys Go Out

BEING THE ADVENTURES OF A KNOWLEDGEABLE STINGRAY,
A TOUGHY LITTLE BUFFALO, AND SOMEONE CALLED PLASTIC



BY EMILY JENKINS ♦ PICTURES BY PAUL O. ZELINSKY

TOYS GO OUT



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A TOUGHY LITTLE BUFFALO,
AND SOMEONE CALLED PLASTIC



EMILY JENKINS
ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL O. ZELINSKY



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With great thanks to Anne Schwartz,
my editor, who saw a light in my little manuscript
that took place entirely in the dark

—E.J.

For Radish Bedundt and his ilk

—P.Z.

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HOW LUMPHY GOT ON THE BIG HIGH BED AND LOST SOMETHING RATHER GOOD-
LOOKING

IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND THE RIGHT BIRTHDAY PRESENT



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CHAPTER ONE



In the Backpack, Where It Is Very Dark

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.”

“Shhh,” 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.”

... ..

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.

... ..

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.

... ..

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 rumbly 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."

... ..

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 is it?

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.

... ..

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.

CHAPTER TWO



The Serious Problem of Plastic-ness

The room with the high bed and the fluffy pillows has bookshelves. Plastic never paid much attention to them before, but now she thinks they are interesting. Most of the shelves hold storybooks, but the bottom one has schoolbooks on it: books about animals, the meanings of words, the size of oceans, and the ways of plants.

“When you’ve been to school like I have,” says StingRay, interrupting one evening as Plastic is looking curiously at the shelves, “—when you’ve gone to show-and-tell and seen the classroom and all the important things they have in there, then you know that books are a place to find out truths.”

“Truths about what?” asks Plastic.

“Just truths,” says StingRay, positioning herself proudly in front of the books. “Like what is two and two?”

“Four,” pipes up Lumphy, who is watching the sun set from the windowsill nearby.

“If we want the answer,” explains StingRay, as if she hasn’t heard him, “we can look it up. Truths like these are in books. That’s what you learn at school, if you’ve been to school like I have.”

“We were *all* at school,” mutters Lumphy, still on the windowsill.

Plastic wants to know which book would have that truth inside, about two and two.

“A book on money,” says StingRay. “It tells you how to be rich and famous

*and how to fill up your really big swimming
pool with liquid gold,
and how to eat expensive chocolates for
breakfast,
and have banquets for hundreds of your best
friends,
and swing from chandeliers made from
diamonds.*

Also, how to count numbers together, if that is the kind of truth you are after.”

“How is that a truth?” calls Lumphy.

“Okay, a fact, then. Facts are in books. If you’ve been to school.”

“Ahem,” coughs Lumphy. “I was right there next to you. Don’t you remember?”

“Where?”

“At school.”

“Time for bed,” StingRay says importantly.

The Little Girl comes into the bedroom and lifts her up to sleep on the high bed with the fluffy pillows, while Lumphy and Plastic stay where they are.

... ..

“Let’s find the book on money,” suggests Plastic, when the lights are out and both StingRay and the Girl are asleep.

Lumphy makes a grouchy noise. Now that it’s night and the Girl can’t see him moving around, he wants to go down the hall to visit TukTuk, the yellow towel who lives in the bathroom. TukTuk always has something interesting to say. She sees a lot of strange behavior in her life as a towel, although she doesn’t get out much. Lumphy particularly likes to hear about tooth brushing and fingernail clipping, things he is not sure he properly understands. “I’m busy,” he tells Plastic.

So Plastic tries to get the one-eared sheep to look for the money book.

“Is there anything about grass in it?” Sheep wants to know.

“I don’t think so. It’s the truths and facts of liquid gold swimming pools.”

“Anything about clover?”

“Probably not,” Plastic is forced to admit.

“If it’s not going to be interesting, I’d just as soon skip it,” Sheep says kindly. She goes to play marbles with the toy mice.

Plastic looks at the books by herself, reading the titles on the spines. One explains the meanings of words. One is full of maps. Another is about the wonderful world of plants. But there isn’t any book on money or gold swimming pools—and even if there was one, Plastic couldn’t pull it out from the shelf.

Only one book lies open on the floor so that she can read it: a book about animals, with pictures and details about how they live, what they eat, and where they sleep at night.

Plastic finds the part about stingrays. They live in the ocean and flap their flipper-wings like birds in the sky. She reads about sheep and how their woolly coats get shorn. She reads about mice, who are part of the rodent family. And she reads a good deal about buffaloes and how they run around in herds.

“Ooh,” she realizes. “I can read about plastics!”

But plastics aren’t there.

She looks again.

They still aren’t there.

Then Plastic goes page by page through the animal book, looking at every picture of every single animal.

None of them looks like her.

Ladybugs are round and red, but Plastic doesn’t have wings like a ladybug.

Turtles are round when their legs are inside their shells, but Plastic does not have a hard shell, or any kind of shell at all.

Hedgehogs are round when they curl themselves in balls, but Plastic is not

spiny like a hedgehog.

People say foxes are red—but really they are much more orange, and anyway, Plastic knows she is not a fox. She is not sure she even has a nose.

Where are the plastics? she wonders, and calls the toy mice over to help her pull out the book on the meanings of words. The mice skitter off as soon as they are done, leaving Plastic alone with the book. It is called a Dictionary.

She finds the P's, and reads: "Plastic. A material produced by polymeri-something-or-other" (a very long word).

But where do we live? wonders Plastic. *What do we like to eat?*

She reads on. "Plastic. Capable of being shaped or formed. Also, artificial."

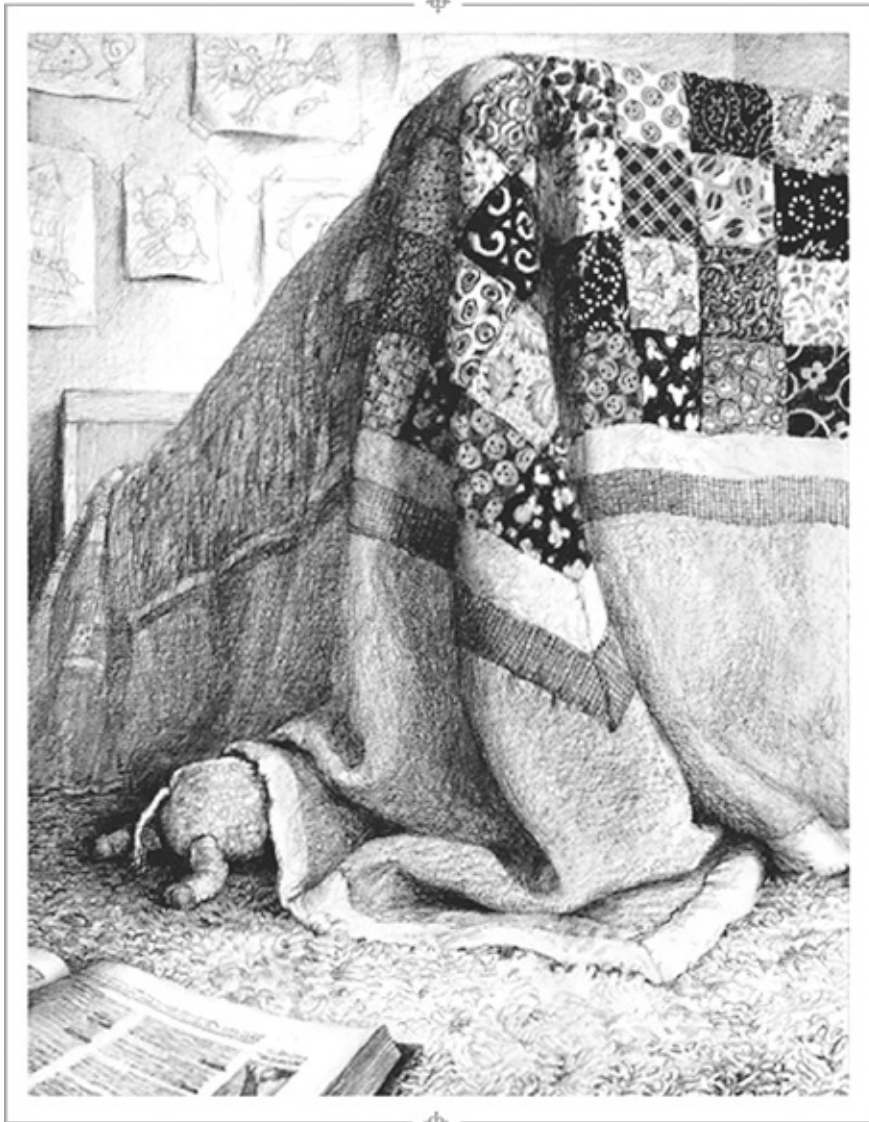
Plastic doesn't know what Artificial means, so she looks that up, too. "Fake," says the dictionary. "Not natural."

Artificial doesn't sound nice at all.

Plastic scoots under the high bed and doesn't come out for several hours.

... ..

When he gets back from visiting TukTuk the towel, Lumphy finds Plastic and crawls under the bed next to her. "Did you know the Little Girl puts a piece of waxy string in between her teeth every night before bed?" he asks. "It's called dental floss."



No, Plastic didn't know.

"I wouldn't want string between my teeth," says Lumphy.

Plastic is not sure she even has teeth.

"Especially not with wax."

"Maybe it feels nice," suggests Plastic. "You never know until you try."

"I know without trying."

"Could it be a cleaning thing? Since she does it in the bathroom."

"Nah," said Lumphy. "What could you clean with a piece of string?"

Plastic doesn't know.

"All this cleaning, I don't see what it's about, anyway," Lumphy adds.

Plastic tells Lumphy about the dictionary and how it says that plastics are Artificial.

"Hmmm." Lumphy scratches his ear and turns around three times in the spot where he plans to sleep. "You don't say what you really think," he says, finally. "You pretend everything's all right when it isn't."

"So?"

"So, that's artificial."

“What about polymeri-something-or-other?”

Lumphy curls himself into a ball. “It’s too late to discuss big words.” He closes his eyes.

Plastic is the tiniest bit angry. “*Real* buffaloes are interested in other people’s problems,” she says. “*Real* buffaloes don’t sleep when someone is talking to them. I read it in a book.”

Lumphy lifts his head. His face looks nervous. “What do you mean, *real* buffaloes?”

Suddenly, Plastic feels like she isn’t being very nice. And whatever plastics are, she wants to be a good one. “Nothing,” she answers. “Never mind.”

... ..

“I need to know the truth about plastics,” Plastic confesses to StingRay the next morning, as they are sunning themselves in a square of light on the shaggy rug. “I can’t find it in a book.”

“What do you need to know?” asks StingRay kindly. “I’m sure I can answer.”

“Their natural habitat,” says Plastic. “And what they eat; and whether they are birds, or fish, or mammals.”

“Mammals, definitely,” answers StingRay, who doesn’t actually know. “They’re very furry, plastics. And their natural habitat is the frozen tundra,

*where icicles grow up from the ground,
and the wind whistles,
and it’s dark thirty hours a day in winter.
The plastics live in igloos that they build with
their teeth,
and they eat whale meat and also seals and
walrus that they catch,
and swallow whole.
Does that help?*

I think it’s a pretty thorough answer.” “Yes, thank you,” says Plastic, with a bit of a snuffle. “I just wonder,” she mentions. “I’m not very furry.”

“You probably lost your fur in an accident,” says StingRay. “It doesn’t look bad at all, though. Really.”

Plastic tries to remember a fur-losing accident, but it must have slipped her mind.

... ..

After seven hours in front of the television, Plastic is as confused as ever. She has watched four cooking shows, two soap operas, endless commercials, and one after-school special. She knows that there are plastic cups, forks, and containers; that these things are useful for taking on picnics and freezing leftover stew; and that a delightful tofu marinade can be made with only six ingredients. She also knows there are plastic toys (“May contain small plastic parts,” the commercials say, “not suitable for children under three”) and plastic garbage bags.

But she hasn't seen any of the plastics eating whale meat, or living in igloos, or growing fur—though maybe the fur is hard to see on the small television screen. In any case, all the plastics look different. Most of them aren't even red. There isn't any herd, like there are herds of buffaloes. The Plastics don't build dams, or collect pollen, or live in tunnels. They *do* appear to be famous—and yet there are no plastics to whom Plastic feels connected. None of them seem to have anything in common besides their plastic-ness.

Which isn't much.

... ..

For four days and four nights, Plastic feels un-bouncy. She doesn't play marbles with the one-eared sheep; she doesn't make jokes with the rocking horse in the corner; and she doesn't play I Doubt It with Lumphy or checkers with StingRay. She looks out the window by herself and thinks about plastic-ness.

On the fifth night, Plastic remembers TukTuk. The towel knows about dental floss and fingernail clippers. Maybe she knows about plastics, too.

Plastic has only met TukTuk once before, and she feels embarrassed as she creeps down the hall and stops outside the bathroom door. Maybe TukTuk will not want a visit from a small, confused plastic. After all, she is used to large and furry friends like Lumphy.

But Plastic can't go on anymore, staring out the window, doing nothing all night.

Slowly, she enters the bathroom.

TukTuk is lying in a pile. The night-light in the bathroom glows a comforting pink, and the air is still warm from the Little Girl's bath.

"Excuse my appearance," says TukTuk, who can't get around on her own. "Plastic, isn't it? I'm always like this after the bath. Damp. On the floor. I'd like an iron and a fold, but this disarray is all that can be managed. Glad to see you nonetheless."

Plastic begins to cry. TukTuk seems like everything a towel should be. So nice, so floppy, and just so ... so very towelly.

"Oh, Plastic!" soothes TukTuk. "There, there. Come, wipe yourself on my corner. I don't mind."

Plastic has a good long cry, and feels a little better. "I'm a rotten plastic," she sniffs to TukTuk. "I've lost my fur. I don't know my habitat, or my eating habits, or whether I build a nest or run in a herd. I'm not even sure I like what plastics *are*, anyway."

A big tear rolls onto the bathroom tile, and she begins mumbling about Fake, Artificial, and polymeri-something-or-other.

"Oh, my dear," comforts TukTuk. "You're upset about nothing."

"It's not nothing! It's plastic-ness!"

"Listen. I have something to tell you."

"You do?"

"It's important. Are you ready?"

Plastic thinks she is.

“You are not a plastic.”

“I’m not?” Plastic isn’t sure if she is happy or un-.

“Plastic is just your name,” says TukTuk. “It’s obvious, to anyone who knows anything, precisely what you are.”

“It is?”

“Of course. You are a rubber ball.”

“I am?”

“I’ve seen balls before you, I’ll see balls after you. A ball is what you are,” says TukTuk. “Tell me, do you bounce?”

“Yes!” cries Plastic. “I do!” And she bounces once, very high, for show.

“And do you roll?”

“Yes!” Plastic rolls around the bathroom until she crashes into the base of the toilet.

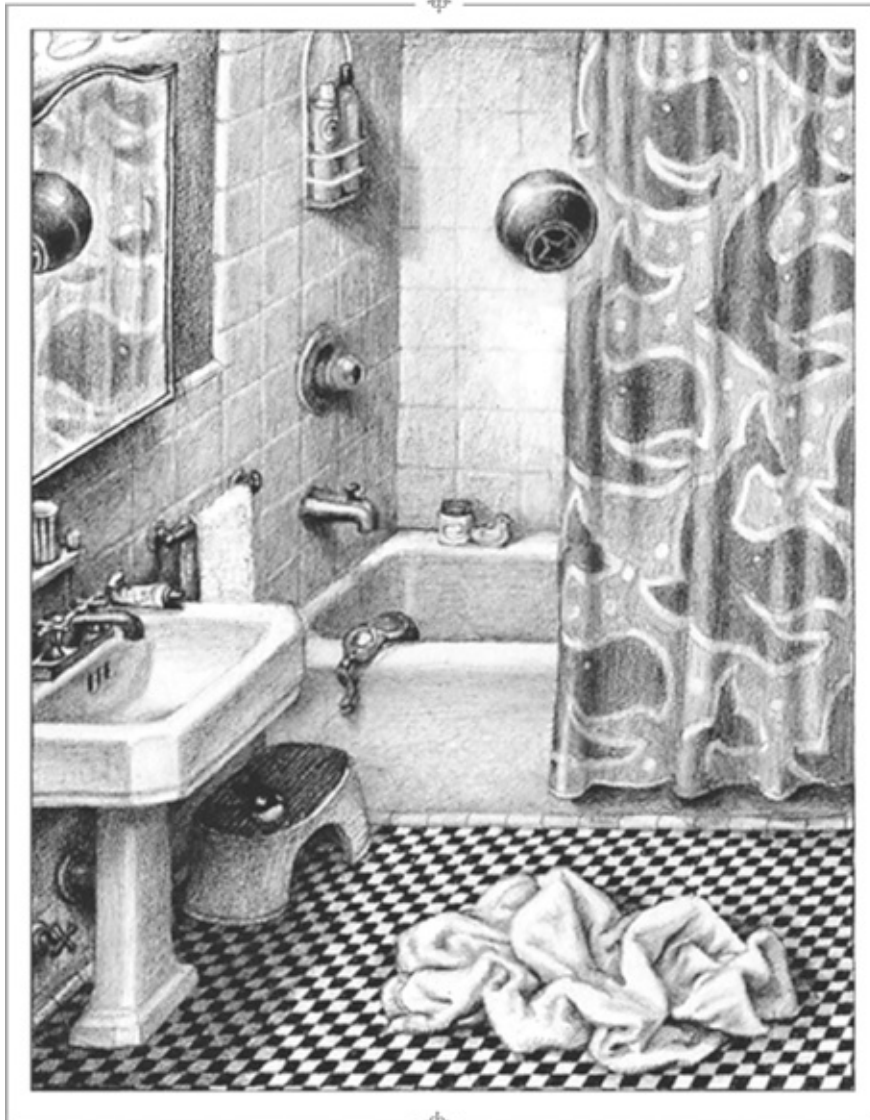
“And have you got front legs and back legs?”

“Um, not exactly,” says Plastic, who most certainly doesn’t have any.

“And no fur whatsoever?”

“No.”

“That’s normal for a ball, you know.”



“What about how I don’t have very much nose?”

“You mean, how you don’t have *any* nose?”

“Um ... yes,” says Plastic.

“That’s normal, too,” explains TukTuk.

Plastic feels relieved.

“I have been around a long time,” says TukTuk. “And I have never seen a ball with fur, or legs, or a nose. You’re a ball, Plastic,” says the towel, wrapping her terry-cloth corners around her friend. “Don’t let anyone tell you different.”

“I’m a ball!” cries Plastic. “A ball, ball, ball!”

Suddenly, she feels bouncy again. Really, really bouncy. She jumps in the tub and rolls around super-fast. She bounces herself so high she hits the ceiling. “A ball!”

“Enough, now. I need a rest,” says TukTuk.

“All right.” Plastic stops bouncing for a second and gives the towel a kiss.

Then she goes rolling, bouncing, rolling,

bouncing,
bounce, bounce, bouncing
down the hall to the bedroom.

CHAPTER THREE



The Terrifying Bigness of the Washing Machine

Lumphy has peanut butter on him. Here is how it happened. He went on a picnic! The Little Girl and her father walked to a park, where there was a big pond and lots of grass and sunshine. The Girl carried Lumphy all the way there, holding on to his tail (it didn't hurt), and then they all three sat on a patchwork blanket and ate peanut butter and jam sandwiches, round green apples, and dried pineapple. They threw rocks into the pond.

Then the sky turned dark and it started to rain. The Girl and her father ran home as fast as they could, with Lumphy in the picnic basket.

The lid of the peanut butter jar was not on tight. Lumphy jounced and joggled and got goo all across his face and front legs. It was very greasy. When they arrived home, the Girl wiped him with a paper napkin, but he is still a very peanut-buttery buffalo.

The father says Lumphy will have to be washed.

"I don't see what the problem is," says Lumphy to StingRay, later that evening. The Little Girl is out for Chinese food with her parents, and the two of them are building block towers on the shaggy rug.

"You're dirty," says StingRay, placing a block on top of her pile.

"It's not dirt. It's food."

"Food is dirt when it's mashed in your fur."

"No it isn't. It's food. Why would it be dirt in your fur, but nice and tasty anywhere else?"

"It would be dirt if it was on the rug," says StingRay. "Or on the sofa."

"Food isn't dirty, or you wouldn't eat it. I have some nice clean food on me. I don't see that it's a problem that needs washing."

"If people think it's dirty, then it is," StingRay claims.

Plastic rolls by on her way to visit the rocking horse in the corner. "People bigger than you," she chimes in. "If people bigger than you think it's dirty—that's when it is."

"Clean is better than dirty," explains StingRay. "Like neat is better than messy,

*and smart is better than stupid,
and chocolate is better than lentils,
and blue is better than orange."*

"I like orange," mutters Lumphy.

"Some people do," allows StingRay, lining up her blocks in a neat row. "But