

Years 7 & 8
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Am I Ready Yet?

Wooden Ducky sat on the shelf. All he ever did was sit . . . and watch. It was a nice shelf, mind you, despite the dust that had built up over the years. The slight disturbance of small groping fingers, their target just out of reach, almost invisible now beneath the grime. He longed for the days when he lived lower down. His vantage point back then did not have the glorious sights he viewed now. Now, he could see all the way to the ends of the earth, that is – the whole living and lounge room, the kitchen, and even the small patch of grass outside the window! But before, when he had only been able to see to the end of this room, and perhaps a sliver of the sky outside through the window – he had never been lonely because he had been loved. For many years now, despite all this beauty, all he knew was loneliness. He had been placed on the shelf by the eldest one, the one they called Mother, after the Small-one, referred to by Mother as ‘Honey’, had pulled his leg off. It didn’t hurt, Ducky was grateful for that. Mother had gently glued his leg back on and placed him out of reach, “Until you are ready,” she had scolded. Ducky wasn’t sure whether the scolding was directed at him or Honey. That had been a long time ago. Honey had grown as big as Mother and had then left. Mother’s hair had greyed, she moved about the house a little slower, and her skin seemed slightly crumpled with use, but Ducky did not think that this made her less beautiful. Ducky was the same as ever, just dustier. He often wondered why the humans changed, but he didn’t. Was something wrong with him? Of course, there was no one that he could really compare himself to, as he was not a human. But he had sometimes wished that he could change, maybe that would bring back the joy and love of the past.

Honey loved Ducky, or at least, they once had. When Honey had played with him, Ducky had felt alive. Like Honey’s imagination had breathed life into his wooden form. They had not meant to break him, and Ducky had never blamed them for that, but they had forgotten him, something that wounded Ducky more than a physical wound ever could. Honey visited Mother from time to time, but Ducky had still not been taken down. He often thought about this. *Was he not ready? What did he have to do to be loved again? Am I ready now? Please, tell me what to do!* He wanted to ask, but they never lifted him down. No-one did.

He tried to flap his wooden wings, but they stayed stuck to his body, as they had since he had been forgotten. He looked down at Mother, she was sitting at the table, staring at the window. She held a mug in her hands. She had filled it that morning but had not drunk any of it yet. The cold dirt-water sloshed around with the slight tremor of her hands, splashing over the sides, but she did not seem to notice even as it dripped down her fingers. She only kept staring . . . and staring. Ducky stopped

watching her, it made his wooden down prickle to see her so lifeless. Instead, he looked over at the old piano. It had been there long before him, seen much more than him. It had seen the world when it was new, the walls freshly painted, and the shelves neatly lined. He used to stand on the piano. Feeling the vibrations of the wonderful music that 'Father' had played, his deep, warm laugh resonating throughout the room as Mother's angelic voice sung along with his notes. Ducky sighed with nostalgia. Father had left long before Ducky had been moved. Only he had never returned. There was still a picture of him on the wall. Ducky strained his cramped wooden neck to glimpse the photo. There were blotchy stains patterning the corners and it was slightly faded, but you could still see the image it depicted. It was of Mother and Father, standing next to each other. The Father held an infant Honey, full of smiles, in his arms. The photo had been taken just before the father-one had gone. Although it was faded now and didn't show the wondrous colours of real life, Ducky could recall the day it was taken. Mother was wearing a beautiful white dress with red blossoms on it and her hair, still brown then, curled in beautiful ringlets. She clung to Father as if he were a lifeline. Honey wore a royal blue jumper, much too big for them, that flopped over their hands and a sky-blue bucket hat that sagged over their eyes and made them squeal with laughter. Finally, the father-one wore a khaki green shirt and pants, and a hat with one side pinned up. A row of badges proudly lined his chest. He smiled bravely at the camera. The mother-one had looked like the cup she was holding now, cheeks wet with spilt tears, smiling, even though she seemed so inwardly miserable. Though she did not seem entirely unhappy either. There was a hint of joy, no, not joy, hope, maybe? Ducky found this befuddling. It was a long time ago when he had felt hopeful.

Ducky let the memory fade and looked over at the real Mother. She was still staring at the window. He looked at her. She looked at the window. He stared. She stared. She suddenly jumped to her feet and hobbled to the door, faster than Ducky had seen her move in a long time. Her wrinkled fingers fumbling with the doorknob. Ducky looked at the window. What had she seen? Was there a stain on the glass she urgently needed to clean? Then his sequin eyes focused *through*. A car was parked outside. What was so exciting about . . . then Ducky suddenly grew as excited as the mother-one. Honey was here! And they had brought their people! Mother-one finally opened the door and in came Honey. Mother and Honey embraced each other tightly, before slowly releasing each other, as though neither of them wanted to let go. Mother gazed with sheer joy at the people Honey had brought along and enveloped them in hugs as well.

Ducky only heard snippets of their conversation, but he managed to put together the things he heard. Honey had brought along two people. One was small, like Honey had been, so long ago. The other one had visited a few times before, she was called 'Ivy', but Ducky found this name very confusing, wasn't that a poisonous plant?! Why would someone name a beautiful human after a poisonous plant?! Humans were very confusing but enthralling too. He would give anything to be closer to them . . .

This was the first time they had brought the small one! He tried to distract himself from his longing. From what he could hear, Mother called the small one 'Yorebaybee', but Ducky did not think this sounded right, though he wouldn't be that surprised if he had heard right. He pieced together what he knew about the Human language and realised that she was saying, "Your Baby." *Ah!* thought Ducky. *That makes more sense!* She was saying that this small human called Baby belonged to Honey and Ivy. He strained his wooden ears to learn more. A few words were passed, but they had mostly finished talking now and moved to sit down at the table. Mother walked over to the kettle and began to fill it from the tap – Ducky always thought of the kettle as a pig because of the squeals it made when it boiled. Honey jumped to their feet, walked over to Mother and gently took the heavy kettle from her hands. She hung her head for a moment, then went to sit down with Ivy and cooed over Baby while Honey got on with making the kettle-pig squeal and scooping the dirt into the cups. When they were done, Honey brought the dirt-water over to the table and tutted at the cold, spilt water around the cup Mother had from earlier. Honey cleared away the dirty cup and wiped up the spill. Honey's eyes drifted, and they looked at the photo of the father-one, their pace slowing, then stopping, their eyes drifted to the piano, and Ducky felt hope swell again, like he had not done in decades. *Please, please . . .* thought Ducky as hard as he could. Honey blinked a few times, as if holding back tears, then their eyes wandered again, and Ducky watched in dismay as they started to turn away. He kept hold of the small spark of hope he had found and defiantly refused to be ignored any more, he positioned himself up for flight, and fell . . .

There was a sickening crack as he landed on the floor. His leg, which had stuck for so many years snapped off again at the weak joint of perished glue. Honey's eyes snapped to his aching figure and a wash of shock, then confusion swept over their face as they walked closer. Then, suddenly, there was a glimmer of recognition in their eyes and their face grew into a huge grin. Honey raced towards Ducky like they had done all those years ago, to embrace him. They swept Ducky into their arms in joy and murmured, "Ducky? Is that you? Is that really you?" and Ducky smiled inwardly, as exuberant as Honey. He flapped his wings for the first time in forever and thought with pride, "I AM ready."