

A Story of Toys

by Maddy Ryder

FADE IN

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

An average bedroom, lit only by a shaft of weak sunlight shining from the window to a bed beneath it. The room is silent apart from the faint background noise of traffic on the road outside. On the bed lies a TOY MOUSE, tucked underneath the blanket with its head on the pillow. TOY MOUSE is made from brown cloth, old but in good condition. On the bedside table there is an alarm clock. As the clock strikes 6:00 am, the alarm begins to ring.

TOY MOUSE stirs suddenly, pulling the covers back and reaching over to turn off the alarm. It lowers itself unsteadily onto the bedroom floor, and makes its way to a full-length mirror propped up against the far wall. on the floor next to the mirror is a green tie, a pack of black marker pens and a bottle of air freshener. TOY MOUSE picks up the tie, which has been cut in half to reduce its length, and fastens it around its neck. It then picks up a marker pen and, after struggling to get the cap off, uses it to darken its pupils, which have faded to grey over time. Finally, the TOY MOUSE picks up the bottle of air freshener and sprays under each arm, as if it is using an oversized can of deodorant.

INT. STAIRCASE - EARLY MORNING

TOY MOUSE descends the stairs slowly, laying on its front and using its arms to lower itself onto each step. This task, which would take a human mere seconds, takes the TOY MOUSE several minutes - it is almost painful to watch.

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

TOY MOUSE stands in front of a large fridge. It pulls at the handle with both arms, clearly struggling, but the door doesn't budge. TOY MOUSE attempts this a few more times before giving up - its whole body droops visibly. Although it has no facial expression, TOY MOUSE is clearly dejected.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

An average living room, covered in dust but otherwise tidy. A pile of books, arranged like a miniature staircase, lean against a large armchair. Sitting in the chair, legs dangling far from the ground, is the TOY MOUSE. It appears to be drinking from a child's plastic teacup.

CUT to OVERHEAD SHOT of TOY MOUSE drinking. The cup is revealed to be empty. TOY MOUSE continues to raise it to his mouth, maintaining the charade.

ZOOM IN to a clock on the wall of the living room. It is now 7:52 am - TOY MOUSE's simple morning routine has taken it almost two hours.

INT. UNDERGROUND TRAIN STATION - MORNING

The station is filled with the noise of trains coming and going. Toys are everywhere, waiting impatiently on crowded benches or hurrying from platform to platform. None of them talk - very few of them have the ability to make any sound at all. Posters line the walls, advertising upcoming films or products. The posters are all old and worn - some have almost faded completely.

Sitting in a corner is an old, battered TOY COWBOY with one eye missing. A dirty string with a plastic ring pull protrudes from his back. A toy stops and drop a coin into a cup in front of it. When this happens, TOY COWBOY pulls the string and 'speaks' in a tinny, pre-recorded voice.

COWBOY

Howdy, partner!

As the first toy hurries on, another stops to drop a coin. COWBOY pulls the string again.

COWBOY

You're my favourite deputy!

TOY MOUSE hurries past, a plastic briefcase in his paw. He passes the cowboy without stopping.

In the background is a train with the doors open. Crowds of toys make their way out into the station. Two Barbie dolls dressed in business clothes hop from the door to the platform. One misses, falling onto the tracks below. Her friend leans down, attempting to pull her up, but cannot

reach her. Nobody stops to help.

INT. OFFICE - MORNING

A typical open plan office. The artificial lights are turned off, and the room is lit with weak sunlight. The room is filled with the noise of various toys tapping away on keyboards, accompanied by the occasional ring of a phone. At first glance the office appears to be functional - a Barbie doll works at a keyboard, a toy poodle answers the phones and a toy monkey appears to be doing something on a tablet. As the camera focuses on each individual, it soon becomes clear that they are, in fact, struggling. Due to her size and limited flexibility, the Barbie doll is having to stand on the desk and, bending at the waist, tap each key with both hands.

The toy poodle hears a phone ring and picks up a receiver, holding it to its ear, but the ringing doesn't stop. Confused, the toy poodle looks down at the phone, only to realise that it has picked up the wrong receiver, and is actually holding part of its colleague, a toy telephone with large, colourful buttons. The toy poodle drops the receiver and holds up its paws in apology, only to be met with a series of increasingly angry sounding beeps, followed by a dial tone.

After some fumbling, the toy monkey manages to turn on the tablet. It lets out a series of excited hoots and screeches, only to realise that its cloth paws will not work the touch screen. The monkey throws the tablet onto the desk in frustration, before putting its head in its paws.

TOY MOUSE hurries past all this, once again ignoring everything. It reaches a desk at the far side of the room where a pile of magazines is stacked, like stairs, allowing TOY MOUSE to climb onto it. Another pile of magazines on the seat allows it to reach the desk. TOY MOUSE sets the plastic briefcase on the desk and, after much struggling, opens it. The briefcase contains a large children's calculator and some bright, plastic food - the kind that can be joined together with tabs of Velcro. TOY MOUSE takes out the calculator and begins pressing buttons, seemingly at random. As the camera moves around the room it is revealed that each computer screen has strings of words and letters, seemingly at random - not a single toy has managed to type a coherent sentence. The illusion of a functioning office is shattered completely.

INT. OFFICE - LATE MORNING

The charade of work continues. TOY MOUSE appears to be concentrating hard, not once lifting its head from the calculator. Across the room, a BABY DOLL with a faded ribbon in her curls attempts to write in a notebook, holding a crayon in both hands. She is older than the other toys, and in worse condition. As she pushes her arms forward there is a discernible 'pop' as one of them is wrenched out of its socket. The room falls silent. As one, the toys abandon their work to stare at the doll. Only TOY MOUSE keeps its head down, but, like the others, it has stopped working.

BABY DOLL looks down at the arm and blinks, slowly, as if in shock. Her eyes snap wide open as she realises what has happened, and she scrambles to pick up the other arm - succeeding only in knocking it onto the ground below. Her fate is sealed - all eyes turn to a door across the room. After a few seconds of silence, the door opens, and in walks an ACTION FIGURE of an old man in a suit, who looks a lot like a certain rich business man from a popular TV show. All eyes are on him as he marches towards BABY DOLL's desk. She holds up her remaining hand, as if pleading, and 'speaks' in the only words she can.

BABY DOLL
Mama! MAMA!

The ACTION FIGURE is unmoved. He reaches behind his back with one hand, touching a string that dangles behind him. With the hand he points at BABY DOLL - she holds up her one arm in protest, but it is too late. He pulls the string.

ACTION FIGURE
You're fired!

The toys remain silent as BABY DOLL climbs down from her seat and walks away, leaving her arm behind. Once again, all eyes are on ACTION FIGURE as he makes his way back to his office. Once the door shuts the toys resume their work, and soon it is as if the incident never happened. The abandoned arm lays untouched on the now empty desk.

TOY MOUSE lifts its head, looking from side to side, as if checking that the coast is clear. Satisfied, it leans down and opens the top drawer of its desk. Inside is a green tie, cut to make it shorter, a pack of black marker pens and a bottle of air freshener, all identical to the ones TOY MOUSE keeps at home. TOY MOUSE's shoulders relax slightly, as if it is relieved.

INT. OFFICE - NOON

The toys break for lunch. A few crowd around an old, out of order vending machine, trying unsuccessfully to pay for their snacks with plastic 'play' money. Each toy in line seems undeterred by the failure of its predecessor - once one toy gives up another immediately takes its place.

The other toys have brought with them plastic food or empty containers. They pretend to fill their cups at empty water coolers or broken coffee machines, and sit down to 'eat' their pretend food. TOY MOUSE opens his briefcase, taking out two slices of plastic bread, some plastic ham, and a slice of plastic cheese, each with a Velcro tab. It fits them together into a sandwich and pretends to eat. When it is finished, TOY MOUSE disassemble the sandwich and returns it to the briefcase. It puts the briefcase underneath the desk and returns to its calculator.

INT. OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The room begins to darken as the sun sets outside. One by one, toys awkwardly pack up their things and leave the office, until only TOY MOUSE is left, still hunched over its calculator.

INT. OFFICE - EVENING

The office is now almost completely dark - the only light comes from the yellow glow of the streetlights outside the building. Finally, TOY MOUSE looks up from its work. It reaches for its briefcase and slowly begins to pack away its things, as if reluctant for the day to end.

INT. UNDERGROUND TRAIN STATION - EVENING

The station is once again crowded, but now the toys are noisier, their clothes brighter. A group of identical dolls with strings on their backs stumble past in high heels and feather boas, clutching each other for support. They pass a male action figure in camo gear who stops to flex his muscles at them. The dolls each pull the strings, giggling simultaneously.

As the action figure walks on, he is approached by a female DOLL with clip on earrings and inexpertly painted-on makeup.

She is wearing a short skirt and a top that has been cut short to reveal her stomach. Behind her are a group of similarly dressed dolls, spaced out around the station. She presses her stomach and 'speaks' to the action figure.

DOLL
Wanna play?

The action figure pauses, then pulls a single plastic coin from his pocket. He hands it to the doll, who tucks it into her waistband. They walk off arm in arm.

TOY MOUSE hurries through the station, once again ignoring everyone it passes. As TOY MOUSE approaches the train, a dirty hand reaches towards it. It is the cowboy from that morning still sat in the corner, with the cup at his feet. TOY MOUSE turns to walk away, but hesitates. TOY COWBOY is still looking at it, gaze unrelenting. TOY MOUSE fumbles with its briefcase, and after some time manages to open it. It takes a plastic slice of ham out of the briefcase and presents it to TOY COWBOY. Overjoyed, the cowboy pulls his string twice in thanks.

TOY COWBOY
Howdy, partner! You're my favourite deputy!

TOY MOUSE hurries on, barely acknowledging the thank you.

INT. TRAIN - EVENING

The train car is dusty and dimly lit - fluorescent lights flicker on and off. TOY MOUSE sits on an old, ripped seat, head down. The carriage door is still open - the train is not moving. After some time, a teddy bear wearing an old fashioned conductors uniform makes its way down the aisle, collecting tickets. The 'tickets' are crudely cut pieces of paper, scribbled on in what appears to be crayon. After a while, toys begin to get up from their seats and exit the train, which has still not left the station. TOY MOUSE picks up its briefcase and hurries back out on to the platform. A group of small plastic army men exit the train in front of TOY MOUSE. Most of them make it to the platform, but some fall into the gap between the steps and the platform. No one stops to help them, or even pauses to acknowledge what has happened. TOY MOUSE is no different - it hurries on, head down, ignoring everyone.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway is dark, the wallpaper peeling off. Just visible among the shadows are a row of pictures on the wall. They appear to be family photos, each one featuring a smiling child - they are all human. Leaning against the wall next to the pictures is a full length mirror and, next to that, a child's nightlight plugged into the wall. A dim glow surrounds the mirror as TOY MOUSE switches the night light on and examines its reflection. It brings a paw to each pupil and rubs them - fortunately, despite the rain, they do not smudge. Satisfied, TOY MOUSE switches off the nightlight and leaves the hallway.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is brightly lit - TOY MOUSE has somehow managed to reach the light switch. It makes its way on unsteady legs to an old television set and presses the ON button. As the screen flickers to life, TOY MOUSE picks up a remote from the TV stand. The remote is almost as big as TOY MOUSE is, and it struggles to walk while carrying it with both paws. It is a slow journey back to the armchair, and as TOY MOUSE begins to climb the pile of books leading to the seat it stumbles several times, unable to use its arms for balance.

Finally, TOY MOUSE makes it to its seat and falls down, visibly exhausted. It awkwardly attempts to press buttons on the TV remote until the screen shows what appears to be a newsroom. Unlike the failing technology TOY MOUSE is forced to deal with, the newsroom appears to be almost fully functional, although once again there is not a human in sight. The toys, however, are all robots, and far more advanced than any toy seen previously. They have full range of movement, and are even able to repeat a variety of fully formed sentences. TOY MOUSE, however, seems unimpressed by this, and - after much struggling - manages to set the volume to 'mute'.

On a screen behind the robot is shaky footage of humans. They march down the streets in droves, pushed along by policemen, leaving cars and houses abandoned behind them. The screen cuts to footage of more humans - this time they are in a hospital. The waiting room is fit to burst and nurses and doctors are running frantically from patient to patient. They are all wearing medical masks. The screen cuts again, showing footage of body bags, hundreds of them, being loaded onto gurneys. The next footage is of crowds of humans, less of them this time, lining up and being separated into groups by policemen. At first, they appear to be in some kind of airport, but as the camera zooms out it is revealed that the

humans are actually getting into rockets - they are at a space station.

In between footage of humans boarding the rockets is more footage of death and disaster - body bags lining the streets, fires and explosions, riots and half demolished houses.

Eyes still on the television, TOY MOUSE picks up its plastic teacup from the arm of its chair and resumes the charade of drinking. When the news ends, TOY MOUSE places the teacup back on the arm of the chair and climbs slowly down the stack of books, dragging the TV remote behind it. TOY MOUSE drags the remote back to the TV stand and places it there as neatly as it can manage.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

TOY MOUSE stands motionless at the bottom of the staircase, eyes fixed upwards. As TOY MOUSE looks up the staircase stretches above it, seemingly endless.

FADE OUT

Commentary:

For my short film script, I decided to chronicle a day in the life of an old toy mouse struggling to live in a world designed for humans, but populated entirely by toys. The idea was to slowly reveal the hardships that such a character would go through, getting worse over time until the character can no longer go on. For this reason, I attempted to write the first scene of the toy mouse's morning routine as comical and almost cartoon-like - something which would not be out of place in a children's film. As the script progressed I attempted to add subtle clues to the reality of the world the toy mouse lived in: a homeless toy cowboy, depending on the kindness of strangers; a Barbie doll watching her friend fall onto the tracks, unable to help her - and unwilling to try for more than a few seconds; a hardworking doll losing her arm and her job in the same day. And throughout all this the toy mouse, keeping its head down, just trying to make it through the day. While at certain points it was tempting to have the character play the hero, I feel that would have taken away from the authenticity of the story: *'Once you give birth to your characters, they are responsible for their own actions, and the effects caused by these actions. Put a volatile character in a compromising situation and he will swing out with both fists; neither he nor you will be able to prevent it.'* (**Therlow 2013**) While it may be satisfying to present the audience with a hero, it is vital to the integrity of the story to stay true to the characters and their personalities.

I believe it is important for the script to create a character who, while sympathetic, is certainly not a hero. This is why I chose not to give the main character a name - the toy

mouse is one of many average toys in an extraordinary, unforgiving world. I based the character of the toy mouse somewhat on Winston Smith from George Orwell's *1984*. Following the life of a character who lives in a world that encourages – even enforces – ignorance in the face of logic is certainly an idea inspired by the book. The idea that *'If you want to keep a secret, you must also hide it from yourself.'* (Orwell 1949) is one that I attempted to apply to my characters – each of them is on some level aware that their world is ill-suited and crumbling around them, but each character chooses to ignore this in favour of keeping up the pretence of normality by following strict social rules. Of course, unlike Orwell's *1984*, it is the social rules rather than a strict 'Big Brother' that keeps the toys in line – everyone joins the pretence because everyone else is pretending, to the point where bowing to peer pressure is a normal point of life

While writing the script, one thing I had to consider was how the film would be produced. I at first considered an animated short film, as the genre has gained significant credibility in recent years: *'Once a "Disney thing," virtually every studio now has a long-term commitment to develop and produce animated features'* (Suppa 2005) But I believe that, although it is to a lesser degree now, the association between animation and 'Disney films still remains. Since my short film script is about toys, I felt it important to emphasize in every way possible that the film was not for children. Among other depressing scenarios, characters meet cruel fates in puddles and train tracks, purchase the affections of 'dolls of the night', and are reduced to begging for plastic money.

Another challenging aspect of writing *a Story of Toys* was creating a plot that contained no obvious plot holes or contradictions – the more 'rules' a plot has, the more obvious it is when a mistake is made: *'The problem in a tightly plotted story is that unless you get it right, and that means making it watertight, any holes you leave will gape large.'* (Sykes 2013). A successful film will also be more likely to garner criticism as a larger audience means a higher chance of someone spotting a mistake. Of course, this may also be used to the advantage of the screenwriter – what at first appears to be a small 'plot hole' can later turn out to be a clue to a twist or surprise in the story. For instance, in my script I placed the homeless toy cowboy at the train station before the toy mouse entered the train in the morning, and showed him again when the toy mouse got back on the train in the evening. Logically this does not make sense – the train station near the toy mouse's house should be an entirely different station from the one near its place of work. The 'plot hole' is resolved when it is revealed that the train never left the station in the first place – the toy mouse's commute is yet another charade. *'In a twist story, foreshadowing is a way to sow clues that give the reader a fair chance of guessing the twist (without making it too obvious)'* (Bettany 2016) By placing the clues in this way, I was able to reveal the twist towards the end of the script, when the twisted reality of the world the toy mouse lives in has become more apparent.

The second, larger twist doesn't appear until the very end of the script, when it is revealed that humans did once live in this world, but were driven away by some kind of disaster. This offers an explanation as to why the world is so ill suited to the toys that now populate it, as well as explaining the evidence of humans in posters and photos. As Bettany (2016) states: *'Any twists should be an integral part of the whole story'* the twist certainly affects the meaning of my plot, revealing that what once appeared to be a strange alternate universe is actually the very world we live in. however, I felt that leaving the twist until the

very end was also important to the plot, as the story is led about the disaster itself, and more about how the world carries on afterwards.

References

Bettany, J (2016) *How to Write Stories with a Twist* Dormouse Press: London

Orwell, G (1949) *1984* Secker and Warburg: London

Suppa, R (2005) *Real Screenwriting: Strategies and Stories from the Trenches* Cengage Learning: Boston

Sykes, C (2013) *How to Craft a Great Story: Creating Perfect Plot and Structure* Hodder & Stoughton: London

Thurlow, C (2013) *Making Short Films, Third Edition: The Complete Guide from Script to Screen* 3rd ed. Bloomsbury Academic: Broadway