

# Claustrophobia

*Written by "Ina Izumi"*

Schiara is a beautiful, young, blonde haired and blue eyed journalist. In her quest for renown and to be recognized as a great journalist, she has plumbed the depths of society for a scoop that would put her on top of the journalistic world. And in the process, discovered some things that perhaps should have stayed buried. Thanks to an anonymous informant within the police, she has discovered that the government has been experimenting on police officers using experimental substances in an attempt to create so-called Super-Police with superhuman powers. Furthermore these experimental substances have already claimed victims within the police of the country. Some occurrences have been subtle, such as deaths seemingly due to intoxication, but others met their ends in extremely violent and bloody ways. The most striking case is that of a police officer who caused chaos and death last year in the course of pursuing some robbers, whom she extrajudicially executed in the middle of the street. Subsequently, said officer was subjected to house arrest and sedated with tranquilizers, but then she mysteriously disappeared off the face of the earth and was never seen again. All record of her was erased from police and governmental databases, and the authorities refused to comment on the case, denying her existence and suggesting the ordeal was some sort of popular myth or Mandela effect.

Schiara thought cracking this case was the perfect route to becoming a famous journalist. Fame and recognition are what drive her, but she has been frustrated in her attempts to find a job with a newspaper or other media outlet. She sometimes wonders why the world is so unfair and so cruel. Why those who work the hardest never seem to get ahead, and others seemingly float to the top by virtue of who they know rather than any talent of their own. Having observed that in her own life, Schiara has become very frustrated with society. She has spent the last six years since graduating from university seeking her place in society, but all she finds is rejection, corruption, and indifference everywhere she goes. So Schiara plans to search for the truth, using the few contacts she has thanks to her deceased parents having worked for the government. Uncovering cases of corruption and publishing them on the Internet seems like the way to get the recognition as a journalist she feels she deserves.

However, as Schiara continued her investigation, she began to empathize more and more with the officers who were victims of this vile experimental substance program. Although Schiara only sought recognition at first, she is a very kind-hearted person and so the more she learned from her police informant, the more she felt a strong responsibility to do something beyond simply publishing her findings. These were ultimately innocent people who deserved justice themselves. The facts of the case would horrify any good and decent person. Test subjects were unknowingly injected with these chemicals during routine medical check-ups. They were told the injections were for a vitamin deficiency and that this would improve their health. When Schiara got her hands on the file of the officer who had gone missing, she found that her name and photograph were censored, and other information was missing as well. It was then that Schiara asked her informant where she might find more information about her case, and was given the address and phone number of an intelligence agent dissatisfied with what the government chose to keep classified.

Schiara called the number several times but no one ever answered. So she decided to pay the agent a

visit at home. Upon arriving at the address, she found a dilapidated and seemingly abandoned residence. Not wanting to waste the trip, Schiara decided to break in and search for any information that might have been left behind, or any clues as to where the agent might have gone. Schiara entered through an open window upstairs, having climbed a tree that was conveniently situated right next to it. When she got inside, the place was dusty and there were a lot of papers lying scattered around. The other odd thing was three dolls laying on a desk covered in dust and cobwebs. Ignoring the dolls, she searched and found a USB stick hidden deep in the back of a desk drawer. She continued her search through this room and the rest of the house, but didn't find much else besides a gun and some ammo. As Schiara prepared to leave the place, she absent mindedly picked up one of the dolls for a closer look. It appeared to be one of those anime figures that some people like to collect. To Schiara's shock, when she picked it up, the doll began to vibrate a little and its face reddened. These were no ordinary dolls, so she put all three of them in her purse before departing.

Once back at her house, she plugged the USB stick into her computer to review the information it contained and was shocked by what she discovered. There was confidential information from government intelligence agencies, along with some notes that appeared to be written by the agent Schiara had tried contacting. After thoroughly searching all the material on the drive for anything related to the missing police officer, all she found was a single paragraph in a larger document that detailed some really bizarre stuff. It talked about a green pill that could shrink the size of a person. Also a purple liquid that could change the biological makeup of a person so their skin becomes a rigid, resin-like substance that is hard yet malleable, and evolve their metabolism so they do not need to eat or breathe, instead receiving nutrients from the air and energy via sunlight like a plant. That actually sounded kinda useful from Schiara's perspective, at least until she read on to the section of the document where it explained that in exchange for being practically immortal, the person's mind will be clouded and they will be trapped in endless ecstasy, their skin hypersensitive to touch and all voluntary movement completely nullified. Communicating with other people would be impossible, as the only observable reactions a person in that state would be able to make were the involuntary muscle spasms and blushing that resulted from another person touching or handling their hypersensitive skin.

The intelligence agent had also been tracking potential victims of these strange substances, namely officers who had disappeared under strange circumstances in the last two years. Among them is a woman with black hair and brown eyes. The last person to testify as having seen her was a driver who dropped her off at work. Although at that time she allegedly had metallic blue hair and red eyes, since she was dressed up as a Christmas elf for a shopping center exhibit. She was working there as part of a program to reintegrate her back into society with the help of government oversight. According to information Schiara got from the person overseeing the violent persons reintegration project, the woman had disappeared on her first day of work, the morning of December 23, without leaving any trace. According to the evidence presented, there were strands of blue hair found near the large oven of a bakery that was part of the mall. Ashes were found inside the oven, so it was ruled that she committed suicide by turning on the oven and locking herself inside in a fit of hysteria. Unfortunately, the security cameras at the mall experienced a mysterious power failure that day, so there is no way to verify what really happened. Her case was closed and no one bothered investigating further.

That sounded entirely too convenient to Schiara, like some creepypasta off the Internet. And how was it even possible that the woman was turned entirely to ash by a simple bakery oven? Schiara wonders

if this person fancied herself a writer and had gotten her fiction mixed up with the investigation. She catches herself when she recalls this person was a disgruntled intelligence agent. Upon closer inspection, all the information appears very technical and authentic looking, like what would be published as part of a real scientific study. Continuing her review, Schiara finds files on other victims that actually have photos attached. She's struck by a sense of déjà vu looking at the pictures of the missing women, before realizing they bear a resemblance to the dolls she picked up along with the USB stick. Some details are different, like one doll having dark blue hair instead of light brown, but otherwise their features are a perfect match. Realizing what she might have in her hand, Schiara began to caress and fondle the three dolls, noticing again the slight spasms and redness of their faces. There are no visible seams that might hide a battery compartment or other internal workings. Could these dolls actually be real people, Schiara wonders in horror?

There was more though. Another innovation under development involved surgically implanting a switch in the back of a person that had already been turned into a doll. It would interface with their nervous system and could turn their minds off completely, rather than leaving them semi-conscious all the time. It was billed as a safety measure against any potential side effects of the violet substance that left the subject still able to move or speak on their own. Another project involved connection points on the neck, wrists, and ankles of the victim along with a spinal interface that would cause them to act like a real puppet. Alternatively, inserting a battery into a small compartment in their back would power circuitry to let them move and speak like normal, at least until the battery was drained after a short while. All these inventions seemed to be geared towards turning people into authentic dolls or toy figures. Schiara was really unsettled by all she had learned, and so decided to go for a walk and smoke a little to clear her mind. First she backed up the information to the cloud though, and took the USB stick with her when she left.

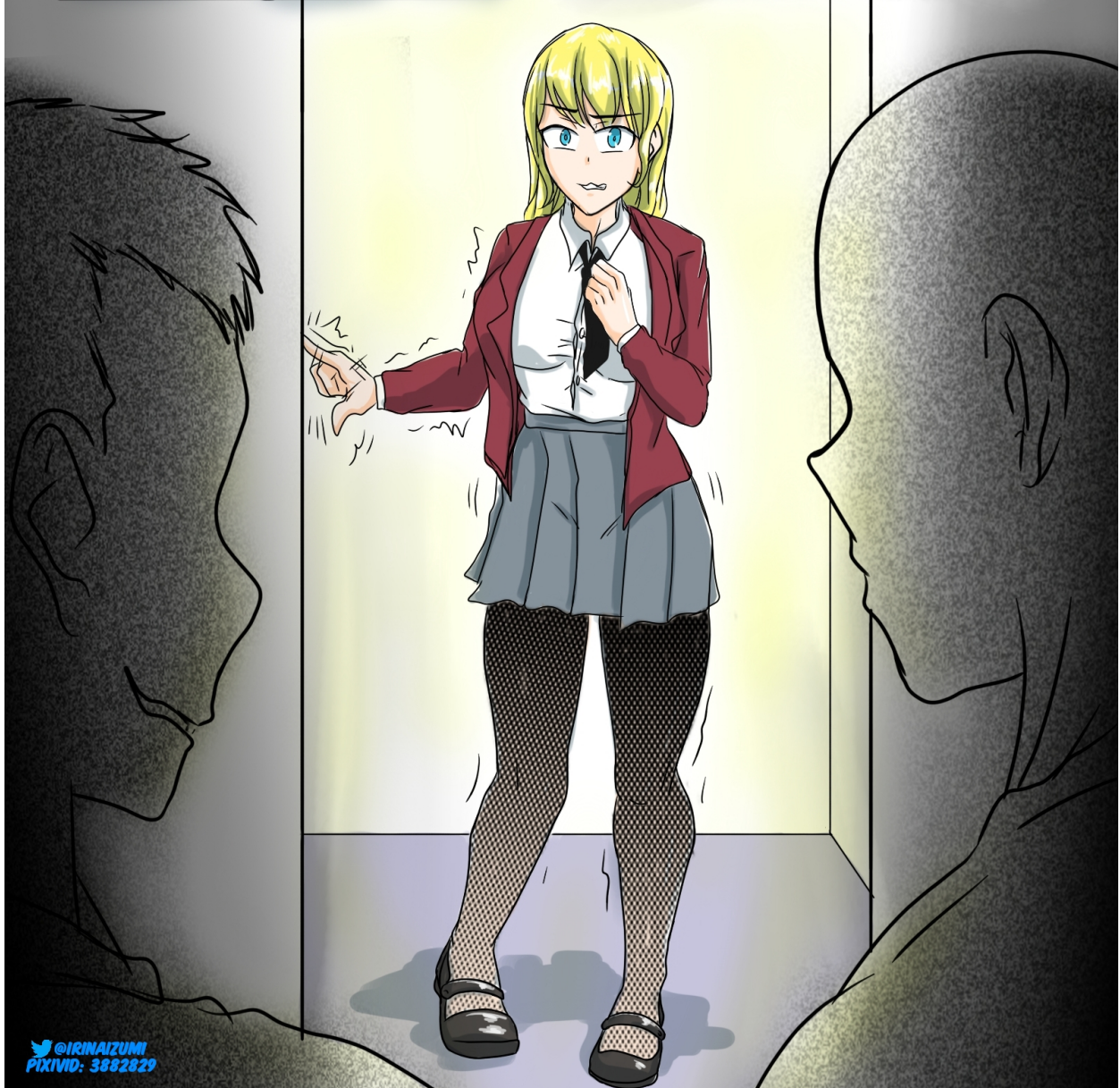
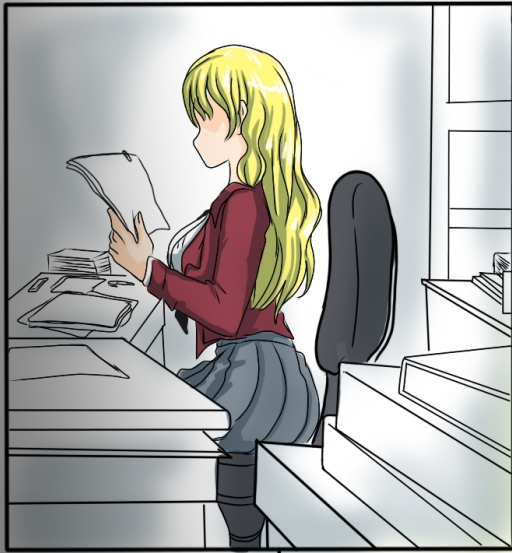
Unfortunately for Schiara, the abandoned house was under surveillance, and someone has been following her since she left there. A car that she saw several times on her way home is now slowly tailing her as she walks through a nearby park at sunset. Two men suddenly exit the car and come at her. Schiara attempts to run, but doesn't get very far before being subdued. One of the men bound and gagged her behind a tree before they tossed her into the trunk of their car, which accelerated away at full speed. Her trunk prison became the most traumatic event of Schiara's life: a small enclosed space, not much air to breathe, and all while being the victim of a kidnapping. Schiara began to struggle violently to free herself, screaming and crying uncontrollably as she imagined all the horrible things these men will do to her. She laments sticking her nose so far into what clearly has the backing of some very powerful people. The next three hours of her life are filled with fear and regret, trapped in the trunk of a car speeding towards what is certainly an even more unpleasant fate.

Three hours felt like an eternity to Schiara, until she suddenly heard gunshots and her heart began to beat even faster as her hysteria only increased. She continued to scream and struggle and cry out as two uniformed police officers pulled her out of the trunk, untied her, and loaded her into an ambulance. Inside is her friend, the police informant she had been working with. Tired and scared, Schiara hands the USB stick to her informant, whispering to him that it should go to an honest person high up in the chain of command, someone who can do something about the terrible information it contains. With the kidnapping, Schiara knows this is more than she can handle, and that perhaps the end of her life is near.

After spending a few days in the hospital, during which Schiara observed some mysterious visitors outside her room, she was discharged and decided to return home. There she opened all the windows to air out the place and make it feel like she wasn't so trapped inside. The kidnapping left her traumatized and suffering from claustrophobia. Schiara spent the following days hiding out at home, reading even more of the information she had backed up from the USB stick and writing down some things that she discovered herself and other details gleaned from the new information. She sent her notes out through food delivery people, paying them extra to act as couriers and take what she found to her friend the policeman, who perhaps was the only person she could trust right now. A few days later, Schiara heard an unexpected knock on her door, and through the discreet security camera she had installed, saw a shadowy figure dressed in a suit standing outside her apartment. Schiara understands the jig is up and her apartment is no longer safe. Quickly getting dressed, Schiara put the three dolls in her jacket and took the Desert Eagle that she had found in the house of that mysterious intelligence agent. Clearly they are already dead or, perhaps, turned into one of those dolls. Schiara has no intention of being next.

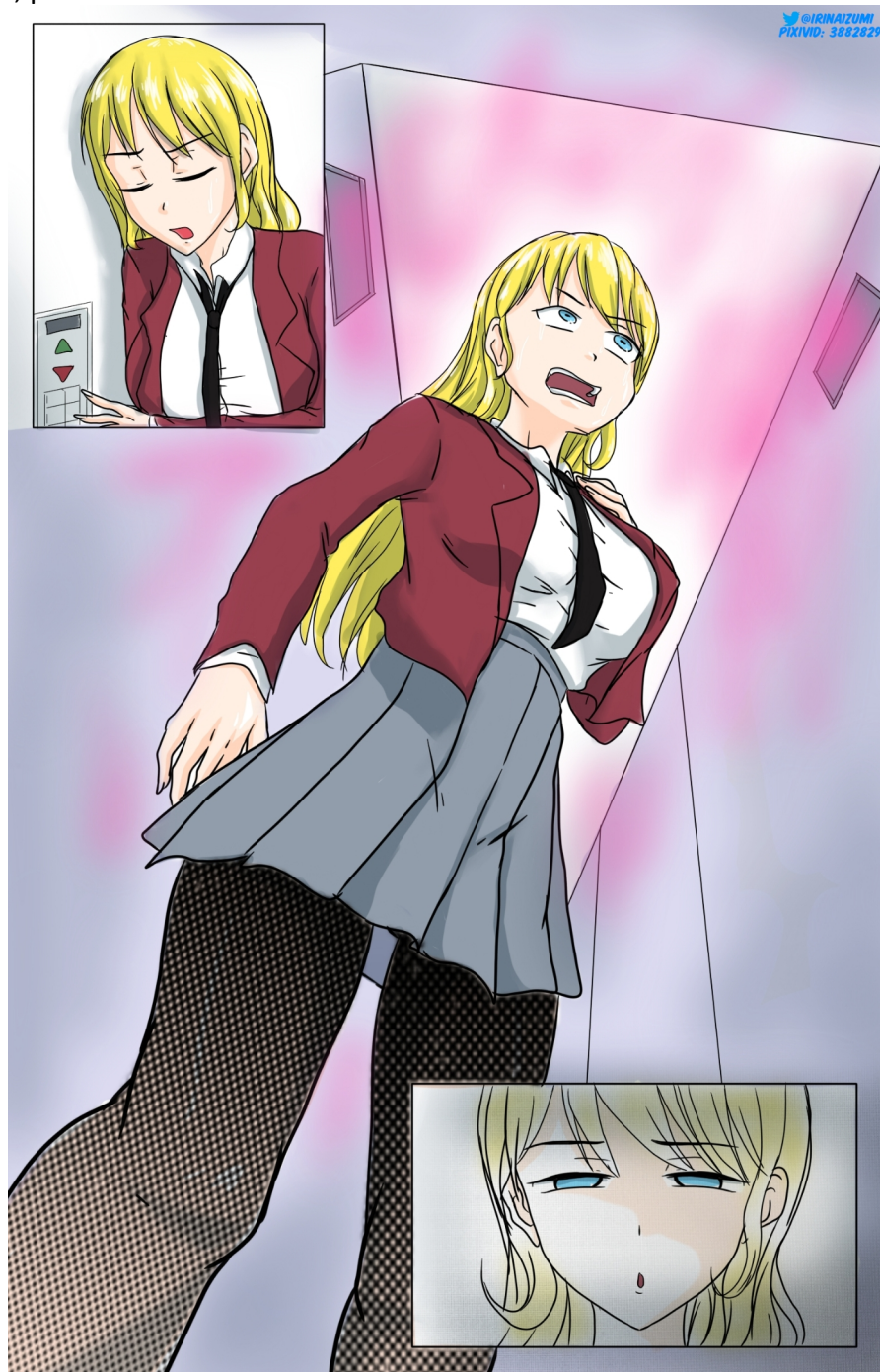
Her apartment was in a newer place that had some degree of automation, so Schiara pressed the button that would open the front door and sighted on where she knew the thug was crouched waiting in the corridor. As the door swung open, Schiara shot him square in the forehead. She'd be damned if her life was going to end at the hands of such sick people, and at this point was willing to drag as many of them to hell as she could, right along with her. Crossing the threshold to examine her handywork, Schiara is greeted by three other men further down the corridor. One of them, a black-haired, red-eyed intelligence agent in a fedora and long black trench coat, calmly asks Schiara to turn herself in. Introducing himself as Markus, he promises everything will be fine and that he will personally see to it she receives the best care possible. Schiara, in her fear from everything that had happened, felt a moment of hope at Markus' charming appearance and calm reassurances. But when she lowered her guard, the other two agents rushed forward in an attempt to subdue her. Schiara was so startled that she raised her weapon and emptied the entire clip into Markus, leaving him fallen and bleeding out on the floor. Realizing she didn't have any bullets left, Schiara turned and sprinted for the elevator, hitting all the call buttons in her panic to get away from the other two men who were still after her.



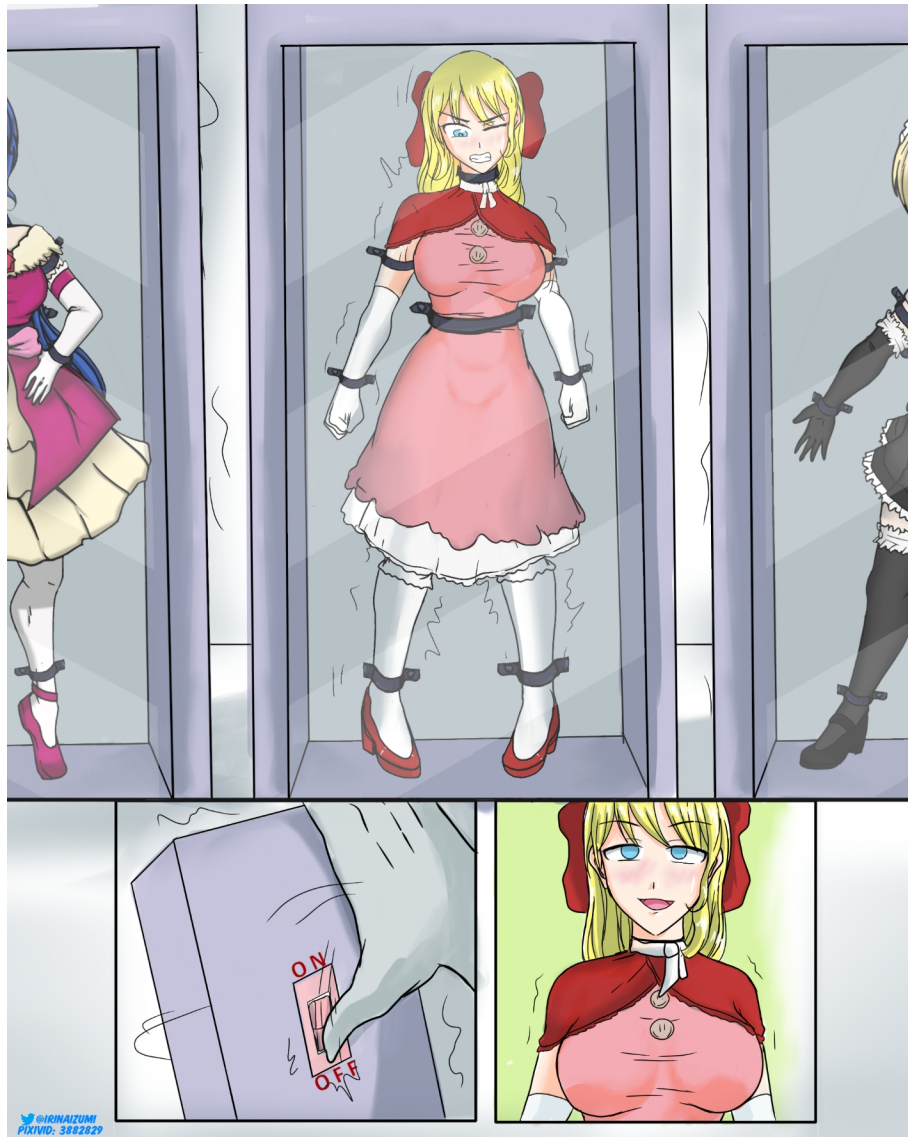




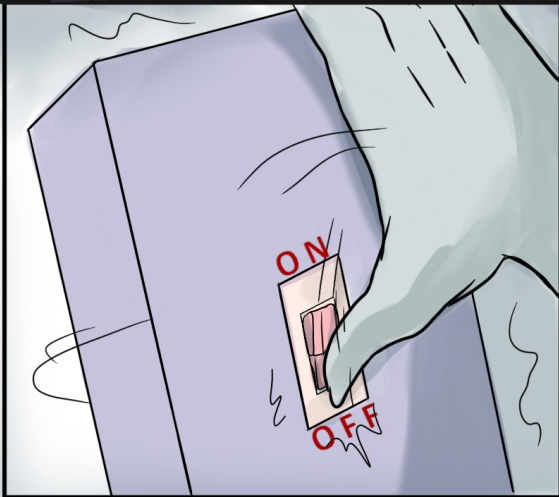
Just before those men reached her, the elevator door closed, not letting them pass. Schiara believed she was finally safe, even if it was only for a few moments, so she relaxed a bit and leaned against the elevator wall. Her brief respite did not last long however, since she was now trapped in the tight confines of the elevator. Schiara was hit with a visceral remembrance of being locked in the trunk of that car, of the fear and anguish she felt as she awaited her fate. As she tried to get her feelings under control, Schiara heard a noise from the roof of the elevator. Schiara looked up and saw a dense, purple cloud emerge from the ceiling. She started banging on the elevator door and screaming for help, but her screams didn't last long. She quickly lost consciousness upon inhaling the violet gas and fell to the ground, passed out cold.

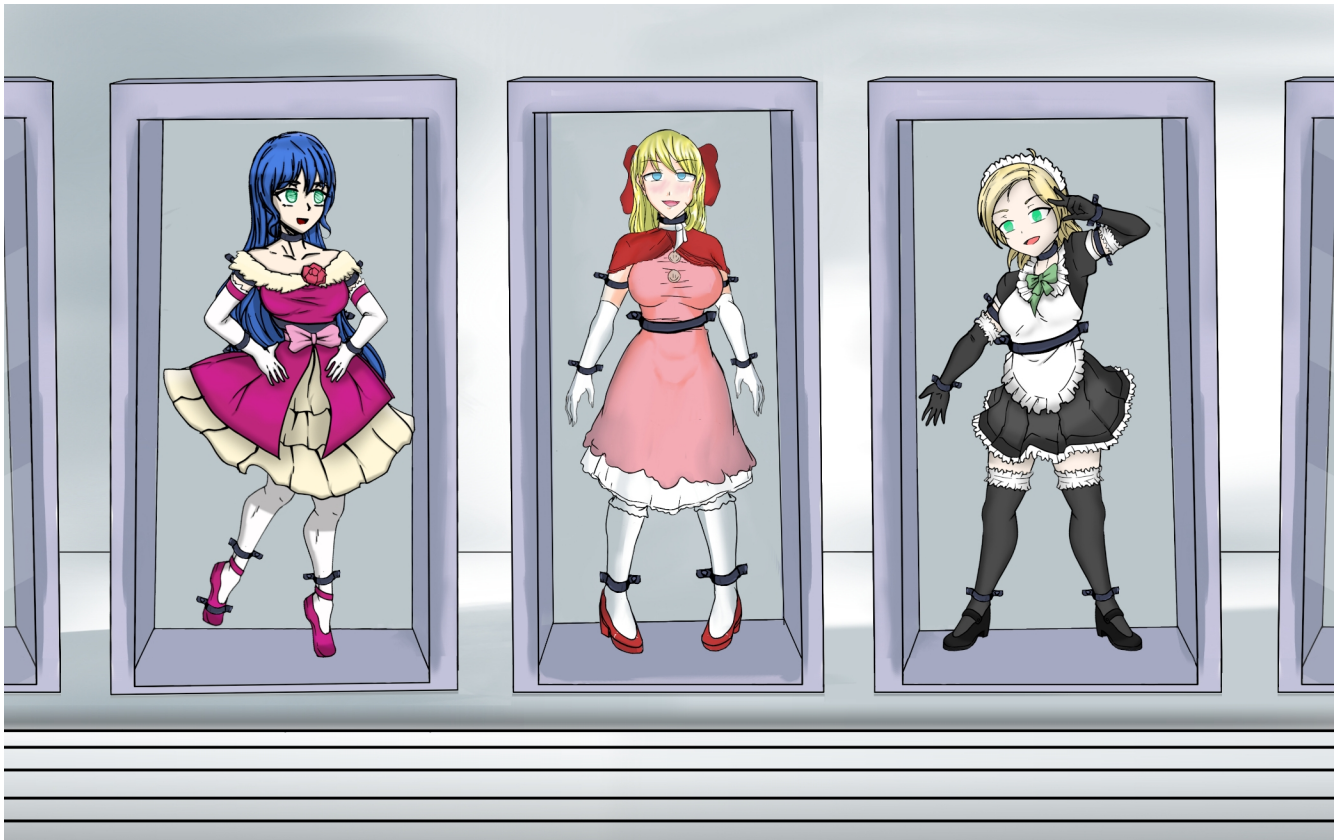
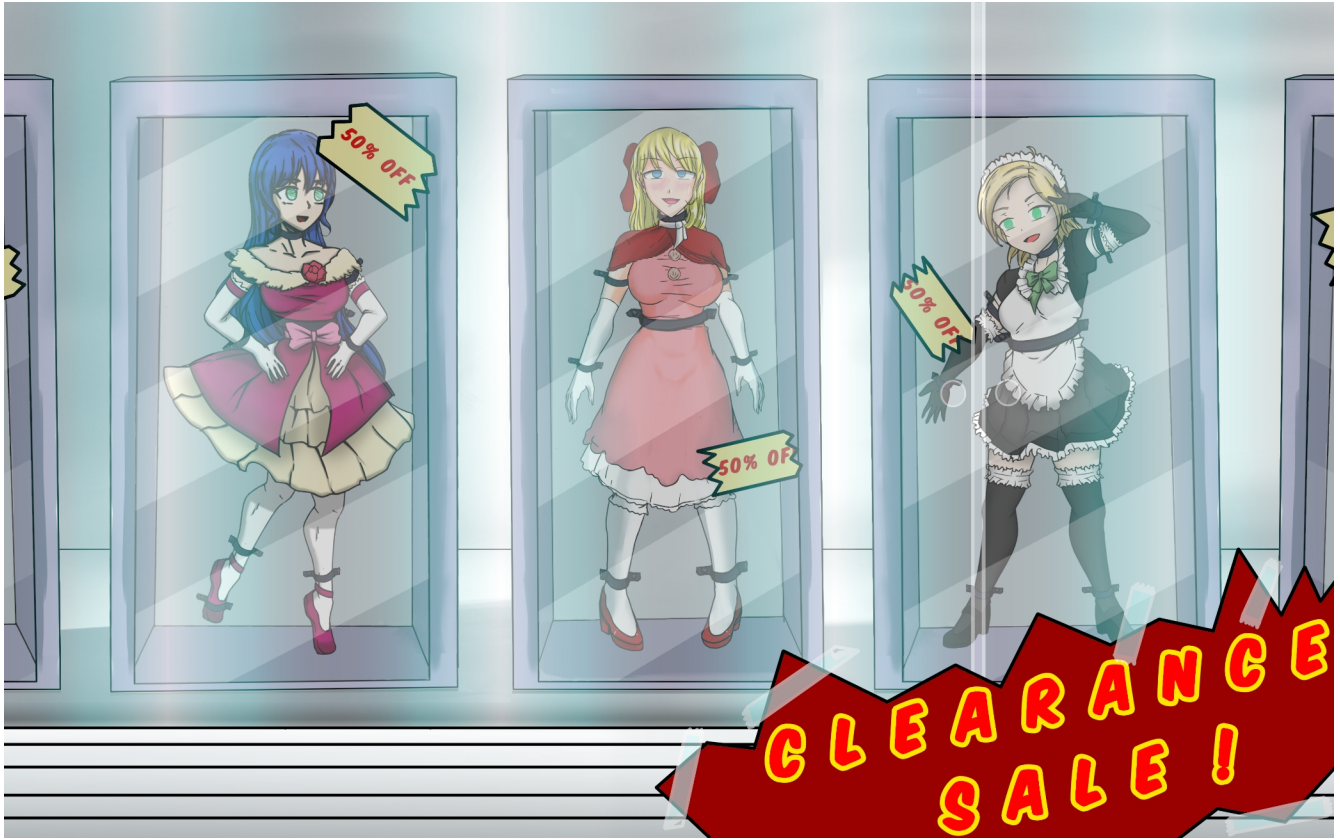


A few hours later, Schiara woke up still stressed and agitated. Opening her eyes little by little, she finds herself locked in ... a doll package? The walls to her sides are opaque, but through the clear panel in front is a glass window, in which she can just make out her reflection and what appear to be other packages containing dolls dressed in ridiculous outfits. She recognizes a couple of the dolls she found in that abandoned house. Upon that realization, Schiara is immediately struck by a panic attack. She felt suffocated in the confines of her small little package prison and began to shake violently in an attempt to free herself. Her limbs were tied securely to the back wall of the box however, and so all she managed to accomplish was shaking the box slightly. It was enough for one of the sales associates in the store to notice the commotion though. Perhaps one of the dolls was suffering a malfunction, they thought. Opening the display case that held Schiara and her cohorts, the associate saw what the problem was: One of the dolls had its switch in the ON position, and so it was a simple matter of switching it OFF. The associate returned the doll in its packaging to the display case and walked away. For her part, Schiara stopped moving almost completely, with only a slight spasm here and there in her arms as evidence of what she was. Now she just smiles sweetly, gazing into infinity, as she begins her new life as a doll. At the end of the day... dolls don't think, do they?











Over time, Schiara lost her memory and even awareness of her own existence. Only occasionally was she cognizant of what was really going on. Although she could perceive what was happening around her, she could only passively observe without really understanding anything or thinking much at all. Schiara wasn't sure if she was still alive. Her days were mostly empty voids, interrupted only by the intense thrill of being picked up by whoever her owner was so they could put a new outfit on her or alter her pose. The rest of the time, Schiara simply existed, lost forever in a haze of pleasure.

