

*Magic exists. It has always existed, and potentially will always exist; yet, it has never existed and never will exist in all likelihood. To the uninitiated, this may seem paradoxical at best; however it is the absolute truth.*

*Humanity has always had a peculiar capability to create power where none exists. Magic is nothing less (or more), than the human psyche making manifest and breaking down and reshaping the world as it sees fit, with little care for rhyme or reason or what the world wants.*

*Things like fire-breathing dragons, wish-granting genies, magic wands, or pacts with gods and demons are both smoke and mirrors, as well as absolute truth. Mankind has long been aware of its own physical fragility, and thus when it came time for its true potential to be expressed, mythical beings and objects sprang up into being to act as conduits for these thoughts and impulses to be made manifest. In our collective ability to play God, we made gods of our own, and gave them power.*

*That is why science and existential philosophy resulted in the widespread scarcity of magic, with both branches' insistence on explaining and measuring everything; and if something was unmeasurable, it then could not exist. As more and more people accepted that as fact, just as generations ago their ancestors had accepted magic as fact, it too manifested as fact.*

*Unlike certain existential philosophers, however, I would argue that just because we made our gods, doesn't make them any less powerful. They have power. Collectively, we are a race of hyper intelligent bumblebees. We should not be able to fly. And yet....*

- *An excerpt from "Do You Believe in Magic?" By Cornelius Crowley.*

## **CHAPTER 1**

1.

### **Susan**

It was a typical Tuesday afternoon at Ma's Diner and Pie Shop. The lunch rush had just ended. The yuppies on their lunch breaks had gone back to work and the travelers looking to get some "authentic southern cuisine" had all paid their tabs, gassed their cars back up, and hit the road for Disney World. Now, all that remained in the sleepy little eatery were the retired folks who had nothing better to do than eat greasy burgers on a hoagie roll and poke at collard greens; in other words: the regulars.

Susan was no regular, but she'd arguably spent more time in the little restaurant than most of the old timers combined. Growing up there had all but guaranteed it; Susan had been washing dishes since she was five, busing tables since she was seven, and cooking since she was nine.

It's just what happened when you were "Ma's" daughter. Growing up, when Susan wasn't at home or at school, chances are, she was working in the family restaurant.

The diner had been her Grandmother's first, and had been passed down to her mother, and as Susan had been raised to believe, would one day be hers in all its greasy spoon glory. There was the rub though: Susan didn't want to be the next "Ma" and continue the family tradition. Renaming the place "Susan's" wouldn't have helped either; Susan wanted out. As long as she was studying at college, she was free; her mother had been okay with her going to school to "discover herself", and to study for a "fallback career" in the event of a worse case scenario. The problem was, Susan had only a matter of weeks before graduation with a degree in accounting, and as far as she was concerned, she was done baking chocolate pecan pies and grilling up "Today's Specials". Now how was she going to tell her mom?

As her mother sat across from her, still wearing an apron while munching on the last slice of Key Lime Pie- she always saved the last slice of pie for herself, which is why she never quite lost the baby weight even though Susan herself was very much blessed with a track runner's physique- Susan had no idea how to broach the subject. Poking with a fork at the remains of her Rueben with one hand, Susan adjusted her thick, black rimmed glasses, almost identical to her mother. They never talked while they ate. It was an unspoken rule that had long ago become an unbreakable law, like gravity. Good. It gave Susan more time to think about how to broach the subject. Unfortunately, her mother wouldn't give her the luxury of time.

As she swallowed the last bit of crust, Susan's mom wiped her mouth and then asked, "So, how long after you graduate before you come back to work?" Just like that, the ball had been put into Susan's court. It wasn't accusatory. There was no hint of a veiled, cynical retort prepared; no expectation of rebuttal. It was an innocent question. This had been the plan all along, hadn't it?

The young woman swallowed hard, and reached for a glass of water, if only to stall. From over her glass, Susan stared at her mother- both of their hair the exact shade of so brown so dark it might be mistaken for black; only Susan's was cropped short and her Mom's was going gray in places- and saw both a woman she loved and a future she hoped to avoid. "Mom," Susan gulped, "I might be a while."

"How long is a while?" Mom arched an eyebrow. "Going for your Masters?" Susan shook her head, eyes closed. "I..." she paused, "I don't want to come back to work."

Her mother's expression shifted instantly. Now she was sitting up a little straighter, her typically soft smile was now a horizontal line across her face. "Oh?" she asked. "Then what do you want to do? Accounting?"

"I don't know," the almost college graduate balked. Accounting had been really just another way to get her mother off her back. Accounting meant that Susan could do the books AND make

eggs benedict for the blue hairs ordering from the breakfast menu at 4 pm; this made her mother more patient. "I just know that this isn't for me." She gestured around the restaurant, as the few remaining customers ate their meals in relative luxury, while the few non-family employees bussed tables.

"But you're good at it," Mom answered. There was a mixed tone of nagging encouragement in her voice, now. Her mother was clearly winding up for a sale's pitch of a sort.

Susan was having none of it. She wasn't about to get guilted or cajoled or flattered into a life that wasn't for her; college had taught her that much. "Just because I'm good at it doesn't mean I like it." There was a pause. Mom said nothing, but the flicker in her eyes said it all. There was a storm brewing behind those eyes. They were about to have a fight. Fuck it. Might as well go for the throat. "I hate it. I don't want to be the next 'Ma' or whatever."

'Ma' just cocked her head to the side, as if she were a particularly confused puppy dog.

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Take a year off," her mother said. "I'll do fine without you for another year. Then when you've gotten this whole 'finding yourself' thing out of your system, we'll talk more." She moved to get up. Susan reached across the table to get her mother to sit. "Honey," Mom's voice sounded both hurt and bemused. "I'm not mad." That was a lie. "If you need more time, you need more time. Believe it or not, I was young once, too."

How patronizing could one woman be? A growl rose up in Susan's throat. "Mom," she said, "this isn't some phase that I'm going to grow out of. When I mean something, I mean it."

A condescending smirk was her mother's initial reply. Followed by, "You mean like how you meant you were going to be a rodeo star?" Susan's face flushed at the implied accusation, like her decision to not take over the family business was akin to the fantasy career of a nine-year-old. Susan, however, wasn't caught completely off guard by this tactic, and had readied a counter of her own.

"More like how I stopped liking dresses, and ribbons, and tea parties and all that girly shit when I was four. Was that a phase?" It was true. By the time she had entered kindergarten, Susan couldn't stand anything that she found overly feminine. A tomboy through and through, she hated skirts, dresses, heels, and so on. Pink anything might as well have been the skull and crossbones for her. The "My Size Barbie" Susan's mother had gotten her for Christmas was redressed in jeans and a t-shirt, its frilly play gown ripped to shreds by a pair of fabric scissors. Her stuffed animals and dolls were all executed by age six. Her mother had assured her that she'd start to like dresses and girly things again when she got older and got interested in boys.

Nope, not the case. Turns out plenty of boys liked a gal who could keep up with them; though there were more than a few who were somehow threatened when she was able to also kick their ass at video games. By contrast, Susan couldn't remember the last time she'd seen her mother wear so much as a pair of jeans, or gone without makeup.

"Susan," her Mom sighed, "You're my daughter, and I love you, but have you really thought this through?"

Susan balked. "Of course I have, Mom," she said. "I know what I want, and it's not this."

"Knowing what you don't want isn't the same thing as knowing what you want and how to get it, little girl. You don't even have a backup plan for your backup if you're not going to become an accountant."

Something snapped in Susan at being referred to as "little girl." But instead of getting loud, Susan went the opposite direction, almost whispering so that her mother had to lean in to properly hear her over the sound of sizzling grills and forks scraping plates. "Mom, I'm grown-up now, I think I can take care of myself."

Upon seeing how much Susan was bothered, her mother leaned back and favored her with a condescending smirk. "Real grown-ups refer to themselves as adults, Susie. And right now you're just proof that it's possible to grow older, but not grow-up." She leaned back and crossed her arms.

Susan hated being called "Susie." She hadn't answered to that diminutive nickname since pre-school. "Well, Janet," Susan copied her mother's intonation, the gloves were about to come off, "You're proof that it's possible to grow older, but not wiser, and-"

Susan's retort was cut off by a low groaning across the floor, like a bass version of nails scraping on a chalkboard. The younger of the two women whipped her head around to see the source of the strange noise. Then, she did a double take and looked at her mother to see if she had noticed. Mom hadn't. How could she not though? Right in front of her eyes, a piece of furniture was scooting itself across the floor towards them.

It was a thick wooden highchair, and not the backless-barstool-meets-baby-swing type that so many restaurants had. This was a proper highchair, wooden and sturdy, with a feeding tray that clicked into place, trapping its intended occupant, and a footrest a few feet above the floor so that tiny feet weren't left dangling. Mom kept three or four of these highchairs in the back of the diner for when the inevitable toddler was brought along; she thought it looked more "homey" than the mass-produced booster stools that other restaurants used. This particular highchair had the word "Baby" stenciled on the back, flanked by pink and blue hand prints. The chair itself was older than Susan; she'd seen baby pictures of her mom in that chair.

And now it was moving across the floor, scraping and scooting, and no one seemed to be paying it any mind.

“What the hell is that?” Susan pointed to the furniture moving of its own accord.

Her mother frowned and scolded her. “Susie. Language.”

“No, seriously,” Susan pressed. “What is that highchair doing dragging itself across the floor?” Susan’s mother looked at the highchair; watching it as it squeaked and groaned across the hardwood floor. Had it been an animal, Mom would have been looking it dead in the eyes.

“Oh Susie,” Mom chuckled. “You’ve got such an imagination.”

Susan’s anger was rapidly transforming into worry. “If this is a prank, it’s not funny.” Tossing her napkin onto the table, she pushed her chair back and stood up; but when she caught a glimpse at her lap, she practically collapsed back into her seat. Her comfortable, worn in, blue jeans were now as white as the napkin that had been in her lap. And just like the highchair, they were becoming animate. A half-gasp, half-scream jumped out of Susan’s mouth as the legs of her pants started shimmying themselves up her legs, bunching up, threatening to go up past her knees. “Mom!” she squeaked out, while trying in vain to tug her rebellious pant legs back down to her ankles. A quick glance at her feet showed the holes in her Crocs were sealing themselves, and socks that hadn’t been there a moment ago were snaking up her legs to cover the skin that her pants were now abandoning.

“What’s wrong, baby?” A look of mild concern now adorned her mother’s face.

Susan got up from her chair, the pounding of her heart drowning out the crinkling rustle coming from between her legs as she stood. “My clothes!” Susan gestured to the ongoing transformation of her wardrobe happening right before everyone’s eyes. Her black Brad Paisley T-shirt that she had gotten at a concert was now bleeding pink, the image of the country singer being erased with it. A white haired old man- a regular- looked up from his potato salad and gave a quiet, knowing chuckle.

“Young’uns”, Susan heard him say.

Her mother, with almost practiced slowness, and more than a little oblivious asked, “What about your clothes, dear?”

The girl’s new socks had stopped at her knees and were in the process of developing little frills at the ends. Her shirt, now completely pink, was starting to puff up at the sleeves. Meanwhile, Susan was fighting off a panic attack, trying futilely to stop her pants from abandoning more of her thighs. “THEY’RE CHANGING!”

With a final prolonged moan of wood scraping against wood, the highchair came to a stop at their table. Why did it seem so much bigger than Susan remembered it? Unconcerned, and clearly mishearing her own daughter, Mom got up and asked, “Do you need to be changed hon? Is that it? Let Mommy check.”

Her mother walked nonchalantly around the highchair. It was only through pure adrenaline and honed reflexes that Susan managed to see her mother's hand dart for her crotch and jump back before she could be groped. "Mom, what the fuck?!"

This elicited the kind of gasp that echoed and repeated itself from everyone in earshot. A waitress stopped jotting down an order for a couple of policemen who had just sat down. "I don't know where she heard that word," Mom said, a blush rising to her face. The comment was directed to the other people in earshot, not to Susan. "Must be from daycare."

"Mine says worse," one of the cops called back, giving 'Ma' a respectful nod before going back to his order. A laugh rippled throughout the restaurant.

Scared, confused, and feeling out of options, Susan lifted up her shirt- its hem was lengthening a bit and flaring to boot- and went to unbutton her jeans. Her fingers slipped and slid uselessly just below her bellybutton, her fingers not so much as even touching the little brass button to unhook her pants. There was no button.

Trying to kick off her shoes- a difficult thing now that they were pink sneakers, laced tight and kept closed by Velcro straps- Susan stumbled and fell into the waiting arms of a particularly adult sized highchair. Like a magnet, the chair seemed to draw her towards it, pinning her upright.

Just before the tray was slid in and snapped shut, isolating her top half from her bottom half, Susan realized her mistake: As the last of her pant legs bunched up, her backside and crotch now bulging and spreading her legs apart, Susan caught sight of a tab on each side of her waist, allowing her pants...no, her underwear...no, her diaper to wrap around her. The cutesy butterfly patterns along the waist and down her crotch were the last thing that Susan got to see before she was trapped in the highchair.

"You're cranky," Mom said, before violating every precept of personal space, and sticking her fingers into the leg gathers of Susan's newly manifested diaper "but not wet. I don't know what's gotten into you Susie, but let's finish our lunch. Then it'll be time for a nice nap."

Somewhere very far away, a being older than Earth itself-a god in some cultures- smiled dreamily at the little blue and green marble off in the distance.

2.

## **Dakota**

The music had stopped. People had stopped eating and put down their pieces of cake. Conversations had stopped. Brendan was down on one knee, looking up at her; a little black box in his outstretched hand. Everyone in the room was looking at them. "Dakota, I met you last year, a few days after my twenty-first birthday. I didn't think it could have gotten any better being twenty-one, and then you came into my life. Now, will you give me the greatest present that I could ever dream of? Dakota Stevens, will you marry me?" Dakota's boyfriend opened the little box to reveal a diamond ring that was...underwhelming.

Damnit. So that's what the coolers full of champagne that Dakota had caught a glimpse of in the kitchen were for. Dakota looked around the room: all of Brendan's friends and relatives all smiling, hopeful faces, his mother was already tearing up a bit. And in that silent, beautiful moment, Dakota laughed.

It wasn't the blushing, flattered, nervous laughter of a girl overcome with emotion. It was a grating, tittering laughter; an incredulous laughter at being given a low-ball offer; a genuine mean-girl laugh. "You're sweet," she sighed, turning around on her heel, "but no."

Every syllable of her rejection bounced through the high roofed country club house, through the halls, up the stairs. Not a soul moved. No one did anything. Anything at all. Faces were practically turning blue from people holding their breath. Brendan got up, choosing wisely to maintain at least a scrap of dignity by being on his feet. "But... why?"

Dakota walked to the nearby guest room, where they'd fooled around on more than one occasion while his parents slept and gave Brendan a glance over her shoulder. "We need to talk," she said, "in private." Like a good little puppy, Brendan followed behind her.

She was sitting on edge of the bed, one perfect leg crossed over the other, while Brendan came in and closed the door behind him. "What the...?" he tried to ask, only to be silenced by her raised finger. For a moment there was only more silence; only the hum of the air conditioning coming in through the vents could be heard. When the nervous chatter restarted, followed by more party music, she nodded and allowed him to speak. "What the heck?!" he demanded, sounding both angry and heartbroken. "Everybody I know is out there! My mom and dad were watching! I've been planning this for weeks!" His voice was soft, but accusing; his gestures quick and wild, but impotent.

The hot blonde pulled the hem of her tight, apple red dress down to just above her crossed knees. "It's not you, it's me," Dakota said briskly and immediately regretted it. She hadn't meant to have THAT talk with him...not yet...especially not at his own birthday party. She'd have to leave then and wouldn't have anything to do for the rest of the day.

Brendan, for his part, looked absolutely devastated. He looked like he might actually cry, poor thing. “You’re breaking up with me?”

His (for now) girlfriend made a show of lowering her jaw to the floor in surprise and then stood up. “What? Honey, baby, pookie, nooooo. I didn’t mean it to come out that way.” She stood up and clicked the few steps and took him into a hug, making sure to squeeze him tightly and rub his back. He liked that, she knew. The rubbing motion soothed him, and he was easily distracted by the feeling of her boobs against his chest.

“That came out wrong,” she whispered. “I love you.”

The hug was quickly broken, with Brendan trying to look her in the eyes. (Damn it!) His anger had lessened visibly, but only hurt (rather than horniness) was filling the void. “I love you too,” he said. “But I thought you wanted to get married.”

“Someday,” Dakota replied, “but not anytime soon.”

Now Brendan was offended. “Why not?”

“I want to live a little more before I settle down and do the whole domestic goddess thing. I wanna be a party girl.” This was true enough, for Dakota’s purposes. Deep down, she knew that when she met Mister (or hell, even Miss) Right, she’d know and throw herself at them with complete abandon. Brendan wasn’t Mister Right, though; just Mister Right Now. (Right now was still pretty good, however. No reason to spoil it.)

“I’m not good enough for you,” Brendan choked back a sob. “Is that it?”

Again, Dakota hugged him and rubbed his back, and began to whisper sweet lies into his ear. “No.” (Yes.) “You’re fine.” He was the son of some very well-to-do people in town. One of the richest families in the county, actually. That was the thing though; they were rich...in town. Brendan and his family were big fish in a tiny little pond. Could Brendan afford to have her as a stay at home wife on his trust fund money? Likely, as long as he finished Med School and worked his ass off. What about the twice yearly vacations to exotic beaches? Probably. For a year or two more at least. But then they’d have to stop, and she’d be stuck...here....in this little podunk town.

It wasn’t even Miami. Even Orlando seemed glorious by comparison. Life was an adventure, and Dakota so badly wanted to go on it. Was she mooching from and using Brendan and by extension, his family? Objectively? Yes. Did she feel guilty about this? No. Even Christopher Columbus needed patronage from Queen Isabella, and it wasn’t like Brendan hadn’t gotten something he’d been wanting (and lost something he’d wanted to lose) in the process.



Dakota wasn't ready to move her relationship time table up though, and a sulking, heart broken birthday boy wouldn't do at all. Time for a change of tactics. "Do you have any idea how much planning a wedding takes? Or how much of that is the bride's responsibility? You'd get a bachelor party."

"You'd get a bachelorette party," Brendan countered, again pulling away, albeit this time a bit less forcefully.

"And plan a bridal shower, and book a florist, and a photographer, and plan decorations, and manage the arch rental, and catering, and seating arrangements, and invitations and save the dates and all the thank you cards and cake." She hammered home each "and" with an index finger poking him in the chest. "Could you even manage to plan your own birthday party?"

Stricken dumb, Brendan just shook his head. Dakota favored him with a kiss on the cheek before pressing her tits against his chest again. His breathing had become heavier, less panicked, and he was all but panting in her ear, a sure sign that he was turned on. Even Dakota was more than a little aroused. Her nipples were so hard it felt like the padding of her bra did nothing at all to conceal them. She might as well not be wearing a bra at all. "Why don't we have a little party in here before we go back out?" she hissed seductively in his ear. The boy's erection was evident against her thigh, but there was something off about it, like there was something in the way of it, (likely his own bruised ego making it harder to get it up). For good measure Dakota gave his butt a playful squeeze, and drew back her hand in shock as she grabbed a lot more than she had expected. (What kind of underwear was that? There was something oddly cushioned about the feel. Had he gained weight or something?)

New sounds from outside the little guest room caused her ears to prick up and birthed new questions to get in the way of her train of thought.

From outside, the words "You put your left foot in, you put your left foot out, you put your left foot in and you shake-it-all-about," wafted in.

"Are they playing the Hokey Pokey?" Dakota wondered aloud.

Brendan nodded. "Uh-huh," he said, "it's my favoritest song in the whole world." He looked back over his shoulder, almost longingly towards the door, as if he were afraid he was missing something. Favorite song? What was up with that? Dakota could have sworn Brendan's favorite song was "Closing Time". She had tuned out a lot of his talking over the last year, but that song and how it's actually about being born was one of his regular bits of trivia he always peppered in. Brendan broke off the hug, and moved for the door.

The fuck?

“Wait.” Dakota called out, sounding more desperate than she had meant to, (she was not about to be beaten by a stupid baby song). “Why don’t we do our own little Hokey Pokey?” A perverted little smile crossed Brendan’s face as he turned back around.

“Okay. What do you wanna do first?” he asked, excitement practically leaking out of him.

She nuzzled his forehead. “For starters,” Dakota told him, kicking off her heels, “take off your pants.”

“But that’s not...” Brendan started to say, sounding confused. (Seriously?)

A finger to his lips silenced him, instantly. “It’s a special kind of Hokey Pokey, baby.” A beat. “Get it?”

“Uh-huh,” Brendan nodded. For some reason Dakota doubted that. There was no liquor on his breath, but Dakota suspected that Brendan had had a few before his failed attempt to entrap her. The liquid courage was just now kicking in, it seemed.

“Take off your pants,” Dakota repeated, going down to her knees.

“I...I don’t know how...”

The little gold digger was not about to ruin her momentum and lose her temper at the dunce. If she could screw him at his own birthday party, while the Hokey Pokey (counted among sexual arousal’s most powerful adversaries) was playing in the background, she could do anything. Even if she had to settle for sucking him off, she’d just remember it for later and make him pay her back double.

She slipped her fingers into the waistband (the surprisingly flexible waistband; lots of elastic) of his khakis and yanked them down to the floor. Her crystal blue eyes looked up from the puddle of fabric around his ankles and up to his boxers, only to bug out at what he was actually wearing.

Dakota stood up and jumped back in one fluid motion. “Is...is that a diaper?!” She spat the last word out as if it were a kind of slur. Brendan looked down at the bulky plastic garment wrapped around his loins.

“Uh-huh,” was all he replied, before popping his thumb into his mouth. It wasn’t even an adult diaper, it had decorations of clouds and balloons on it. For all intents and purposes it was something you’d expect to see on a two year old, not a twenty-two year old. “Whyyyyyy?” he asked; his tone a combination of playful and nonchalant as if Dakota had asked him if the sky was blue or if water was wet, (speaking of wet, was the damn thing sagging a little bit?).

The young woman, once feeling in control even when surrounded by strangers expecting a “Yes” from a hackneyed marriage proposal, was completely out of her element. Is this why he proposed to her on his birthday? Was he some kind of gross fetishist and this was his way of telling her? Too many things made the worst kind of sense in this moment, Brendan’s obsession with “Closing Time” among them.

“Fo now wha?” the freak mumbled around his thumb, shuffling towards her with his pants around his ankles, the diaper, (definitely sagging and wet) swaying between his thighs. “Get away from me!” Dakota shrieked, backing up as she pushed him. In near perfect symmetry, the two fell back in opposite directions: He fell to the floor, a squishy thump as his padded backside hit the carpet. She fell to the bed, her knees buckling upon contact; the momentum carrying her to her back. As if on reflex, her legs went ceiling ward, causing the front of her dress to fall up past her hips.

There was a moment of stunned silence from each of them. Then they both screamed; his, the wail of a toddler who’d just fallen; hers, the shouts of someone who was losing their mind. Dakota was wearing a diaper, same as his.

Confused and panicking, she scrambled to her knees and looked down at her waist; not even having to lift the hem of her dress to see the bulky white thing poking out from underneath. Balloons and stars, flowers and clouds, all childishly drawn, mocked her from below her belly button. It crinkled like a million sanitary pads...and it was getting warmer.

“I’m peeing!” she screeched, clawing uselessly at her crotch; trying to hold it in, instead of going for the tapes of her diaper. (What? Her diaper? Don’t be ridiculous. Urine marked or not, it was not HER diaper.) Preoccupied with staunching the flow of urine she was involuntarily releasing into what used to be her panties, Dakota failed to notice that her dress was shrinking, or that the two dainty “hanger helpers” sewed into the back of the dress were snaking their way up to her head. By the time the stream inside her disposable underwear had ended, her dress was just a T-shirt.

When a picture of Dora the Explorer manifested on the only thing covering her chest, Dakota clutched her head, as if she could squeeze the insanity out of her own skull. Her hands clasped upon two pig-tails. With Brendan still crying, and her own wet diaper hampering her movement and causing no end of distraction, Dakota stood up on the mattress and looked to the floor for her shoes. They were gone. Just vanished, while her boyfriend blubbered on the floor with his pants around his ankles and his diaper swelling. (Where were his shoes, too, come to think of it?)

The door opened and Dakota froze in place, feeling, (and looking) like a complete idiot. A middle aged woman stepped in, her face a mixture of curiosity and worry. “Mommy!” Brendan yelled. All tears stopped as if turning off a switch.

"Mrs. Jay!" Dakota began. "I can explain!" (Not in a million years at this rate.)

Brendan's mother surveyed the room and then looked down at her son, still in a very compromising position. "Are you two playing in here?"

Brendan nodded, enthusiastically. "Uh-huh," he agreed. "We're doin' the Hokey Pokey!"

"You are?" Mrs. Jay asked, without really asking; the same way a person might ask a small child, (or a mental midget). "We were just doing that outside." His mother helped Brendan up. "But why are your pants down, little monkey?"

Dakota's (apparently now baby) boyfriend pointed at her and said, "It was Dakota's idea. We was doing a special Hokey Pokey." Dakota's cheeks now matched the color of her T-shirt perfectly. She clapped her hands to her face, trying desperately to hide her humiliation. "I hadda take my pants off. Dakota helped. It was the rules." Brendan spoke with zero shame and absolute seriousness.

His mother, who was busy yanking up Brendan's pants for him, cast a wry smile and knowing look at Dakota. "Did she, now?" Dakota wasn't sure if that was some form of approval, scorn, neither, or both. If she hadn't just emptied her bladder seconds before, she might have likely peed a little in fright. "Well how about we all go play with all of your little friends, instead of hiding in our guest room?"

"Okay!" Brendan agreed. He ran out the door, leaving Dakota standing on the bed in a wet diaper, quivering in fear of his mother.

"Dakota," Mrs. Jay said with only a hint of sternness in her voice. "Get off the bed, you naughty girl." Without thinking, Dakota obeyed. The crinkling of the diaper and the distinct waddle in her gait making every tiny step more embarrassing and more complicated than it had any right to be.

The older woman, a blonde herself (but not a natural blonde, obviously), reached for Dakota's hand as she stepped back onto the carpet, helping her down. "You forgot this," Mrs. Jay dug into her pocket, producing a ring pop. The red candy on the end of the plastic ring was infinitely bigger than the little rock Brendan had offered her. "It's not nice to refuse party favors."

"I'm...sorry?" Dakota choked out, feeling dizzy and confused as her boyfriend's Mommy slipped the candy ring around her finger.

"I know you are. Come along, Dakota. Let's go play."

Somewhere very far away, a being older than Earth itself- a god in some cultures- smiled dreamily at the little blue and green marble off in the distance.

3.

### **Kelsey**

Kelsey sat in the courtyard by the old “wishing fountain”- its collection of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters glimmering in the midday sun- studying. “When tweetle beetles fight, it’s called a tweetle beetle battle. And when they battle in a puddle, it’s a tweetle beetle puddle battle. And when the tweetle beetles battle with paddles in a puddle, they call it a tweetle beetle puddle paddle battle. And when beetles battle beetles in a puddle battle paddle...” she stopped. “Wait,” Kelsey frowned. “That’s not right...when the tweetle beetles battle in a puddle with the paddles...? When beetles paddle battle bee....” She groaned before finally giving up and checking her copy of Fox In Sox.

Her eyes danced over the tongue twister script for what must have been the two dozenth time that afternoon alone. A deep breath later, both Kelsey’s eyes and book were closed. “And when the tweetle beetles battle with paddles in a puddle, they call it a tweetle beetle puddle paddle battle.” Her eyes opened, and she smiled with satisfaction. “Nailed it,” she whispered to herself.

Content for the moment, Kelsey put the Dr. Seuss book back down on the cobblestones, and picked up her bottle of bubbles. With the practiced ease of a lifetime of repetition, Kelsey unscrewed the white lid and reached in and pulled out the soaking, sudsy wet bubble wand. Her lips pursed together and blew, sending dozens of tiny bubbles sailing up into the air.

The frizzy haired college senior watched, almost mesmerized as the little suds were carried by the wind to their inevitable doom. Two bumped into each other and formed a single, larger bubble. Two more collided and instead of making a bigger bubble, merged into a two-headed conjoined bubble.

Dipping the wand into the solution once more, Kelsey blew again, this time slowly. As intended, a single large bubble formed and just barely broke off from the wand, becoming a proper sphere about the size of a baseball for the few seconds it was in existence. Bubble blowing was like a sort of meditation for Kelsey, if not an outright addiction. It calmed her; it rewarded her; it made her feel accomplished. The juvenile activity had gotten her through many a study session.

“Just memorize three more facts about dissociative identity disorder, and you can blow some bubbles,” she’d promise herself. “Just remember the differences between Freud’s child development theories versus Piaget’s and you can blow some bubbles.” It was surprisingly effective for her, and Kelsey had attained enough balance in herself to not overindulge or push herself too hard.

Kelsey had her eyes set on becoming a clinical psychologist, and was only a few precious weeks away from earning her bachelor’s degree in psychology. Not that a bachelor’s degree

was the endgame, but it was another rung on the ladder to climb for her eventual PhD. It was, however, still worth taking time to bask in her accomplishment.

The kid's book that she was committing to memory was decidedly not for her degree. This semester, she had elected to take an intro into drama and performing arts course, mostly for grins. And why not? Kelsey had already taken most every other psychology class available to her. It was time to let her hair down and get some more "Gen-Ed" stuff, and become more "well rounded."

It was an acting course geared for non-acting majors, with the on paper goal of enticing non-acting majors to change their field of study. In practice, it was a course for a T.A. to teach so that they could get their Master's Degree.

This semester had been mostly different hokey acting exercises, a required viewing of the campus's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, and selected monologue readings. For her final though, Kelsey was required to read, memorize, and recite (with appropriate dramatic inflections) a poem of her choice. A coin flip into the fountain determined that Kelsey would be memorizing the entirety of *Fox in Socks* instead of a passage from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*.

That was fine by Kelsey. She liked Silverstein well enough, and he had a kind of fanciful whimsy about his work, but he was the Lope de Vega to Seuss's William Shakespeare. Lope de Vega had written some pretty interesting stuff and was a contemporary of Shakespeare, but before this semester Kelsey wouldn't have had any idea who he was; and that was kind of the point.

Her classmates might know Shel Silverstein; they'd definitely know Dr. Seuss. Also, how could she pass up the chance to recite arguably the world's longest tongue twister? By this time tomorrow, she'd have all fifty-seven stanzas memorized. Boom! Winner: Kelsey. The only difficult choice left to her was whether or not she'd speak in funny voices to differentiate Fox from Knox. Decisions, decisions.

Kelsey had had a hard time growing up. That is not to say that her life had been particularly difficult; both of her parents loved her very much and provided for her anything she needed. It was more like she had a difficult time growing out of the different phases and interests of her peers.

The comedy, as well as the technical artistry, of shows like *Sesame Street* still kept her attention, and she still squee'd with joy every time a pop-culture reference was made or a celebrity made a cameo with the puppets. The bed in her dorm room was covered with so many stuffed animals she didn't need pillows. To Kelsey, coloring was an art form in and of itself. All of the dresses she wore for "going out" were frilly and cumbersome to the point of impracticality. She didn't own a single T-shirt that didn't have a cartoon character on it non-ironically.

Even though she was in her twenties, Kelsey was regularly mistaken as much younger; high-school at best. Her wardrobe didn't help remedy that misconception. Her petite build and small stature didn't make things any easier; her parents had long joked that her hair was the biggest thing about her. Carrying around her student I.D. and driver's license had always been a necessity; one that was as second nature to her as the fluid ease of dipping a plastic wand into bubble solution and letting loose a flight of soapy globules.

The college senior just didn't see the point in what her parents called "phases" or "growing out" of something. Things like diapers and cribs were fine to cast off; independence was a good thing. But how did liking cartoons and dolls and Silly Putty somehow make her less mature when her friends had moved beyond such things? How did taking her Tinkerbell night light to school make her more infantile?

The short answer: it didn't. For Kelsey, acquiring new tastes and seeking out new experiences was no reason to get rid of other interests that were still perfectly stimulating. Kelsey drank from both beer bottles and sippy cups. Her Netflix history had *Stranger Things* and *Curious George* back to back. She was studying psychology and memorizing Dr. Seuss. Because why not?

Content with her most recent bout of bubble blowing, Kelsey stowed the wand back in the bottle, and screwed the cap back on tight. She took a moment and examined her outfit: A dark purple shirt with Daisy Duck on it, obscured by the bib of her shortalls. This did nothing to make her look more "grown-up", the garment made her A-cup breasts all but non-existent, but that wasn't particularly a concern for Kelsey. She was comfortable, she looked cute with plenty of leg to show off, and if she bent over, no one would have the slightest chance at taking a peek at her *Days of the Week* panties.

As she sat next to the so-called "Wishing Fountain", other students milled about the courtyard, meeting up with each other, going to or from class, and generally just being oblivious to her presence. A tiny girl lounging in kid's clothes was hardly a spectacle on campus, and Kelsey had been seen doing it so often that she was practically part of the scenery herself. Even the freshmen had lost that look of wonder and (perhaps) slight hint of judgement in their eyes at looking at her.

If someone really wanted to people watch, the evangelical would-be preachers across the street from campus were enough entertainment, with their big signs and checklists for who was going to Hell for not living exactly like them in every way, shape and form. If you weren't entertained by their ranting, you could be pleasantly distracted by the hecklers who were inevitably drawn to them. If you weren't amused by the two heaping doses of negative energy just throwing gasoline on each other's fire, both sides too stubborn to throw up their hands and go about their day, you were doing it wrong.

The college senior was about to pick up her copy of Fox In Socks and start hitting the books again, when a shadow blocked her sunlight. Someone was looking over her. Shielding her eyes, Kelsey looked up into the face of a decidedly tall young woman. "Hey, whatcha readin'?"

Kelsey looked up and shrugged nonchalantly. "Fox In Socks," she replied, before glancing back down at the smiling Seussian fox on the cover. What she had expected was an "oh", or an "okay", and then the other girl would walk off, leaving Kelsey to her memorization. Worst case scenario, Kelsey imagined she'd get a "why" and then she'd have to explain the acting class.

Instead she got: "Neato! I love that book! It's the bestest!"

Kelsey looked back up at the stranger, pleasantly surprised. "Really?"

"Yeah, it's my favorite." The new girl made a show of clearing her throat. "And when tweetle beetles battle with paddles in a puddle, they call it a tweetle beetle puddle paddle battle." Wow! This girl had memorized the passage already! Kelsey climbed to her feet, smiling the whole way up. The sun out of her eyes, she got a good look at the newcomer. A puffball of red hair poked out of an otherwise well groomed head of hair tied back into a ponytail. Better yet, Kelsey saw that this newcomer was also wearing shortalls, the bib blocking out what had to be Minnie Mouse. The only other difference was this new girl wore khaki instead of denim. Could this really be a kindred spirit?

"And when beetles battle beetles in a puddle paddle battle and the beetle battle puddle is a puddle in a bottle," Kelsey continued the recitation, "they call this a tweetle beetle bottle puddle paddle battle muddle." The new girl slapped her knee and giggled so hard it seemed as though her freckles might fall off.

The new girl kept going, saying the lines through her own laughter. "And when beetles...hee hee... fight these battles...heh... in a bottle with their paddles...hahahahaha..!"

Inspired and mentally on fire, Kelsey kept it going. "And the bottle's on a poodle, and the poodle's eating noodles they call this a-

"MUDDLE PUDDLE TWEETLE POODLE BEETLE NOODLE BOTTLE PADDLE BATTLE!" the two finished together before spontaneously collapsing, giggling in each other's arms in a warm embrace. How amazing this felt, to finally have someone else to talk to about this kind of stuff with. It was something Kelsey had never known she had always wanted.

"My name's Kelsey," the senior offered the hand to her new, much taller friend. The new girl in the khaki shortalls took her hand. "I know," she replied, "My name's Megan."

Megan?



Megan?!

Megan the R.A.? Megan: Organizer of lame movie nights and destroyer of keg parties? Everybody's- not-fun-twenty-two-year-old-mom-away-from-home? That Megan?! Kelsey held her breath and squinted. It was her! Kelsey hadn't recognized the other girl with a smile on her face, never mind the red hair; under normal circumstances Megan dyed her hair jet black. Granted, shortalls were just about as modesty preserving as the kind of stuff Megan normally wore, but never in a million years would Kelsey have accused Megan of being...fun.

"Oh...Megan...Megan!" Kelsey jumped, her genuine smile of pleasure turning into a rictus grin of anxiety. "Hiiiiii!" Feeling incredibly awkward and unsure of what else to do, Kelsey gestured around the courtyard and the surrounding dorms. "So good to see you here...."

Brought out of her own little world, Kelsey noticed that others were dressed just as juvenily as she typically preferred to be. Girls skipped along in rainbow colored skirts and matching bows in their hair. A couple boys she recognized were in shortalls as well and were toting Teddy bears, besides. A neighbor Kelsey often passed in the hallways was walking past them sucking on a pacifier and wearing baby blue footie pajamas that looked soft. And they were all walking in the same direction. "Good to see you, too," Megan replied, not noticing or not caring about Kelsey's non-verbal communication of total discombobulation.

Kelsey kept looking around. So many people...all dressed like her. What was going on? "Is there some kind of party going on here?"

"Naw," the taller girl shook her head. "Parties have those fancy hats with the string that goes under your chin and cake and stuff." She pointed in the direction that the other college kids were going. "But they've got a bunch of fun stuff on the playground over there. You wanna come?"

"Playground?"

"Yeah," Megan nodded. "Bouncy houses and slides and stuff. They even have a ball pit."

"Ball pit!" the shorter girl squeaked. Kelsey could handle people acting a little more...like her if it meant a ball pit. No further questions, Your Honor. "Let's go!"

The two young women broke off into a run, the bottle of bubbles and the Fox In Socks book completely forgotten as their feet pounded on the cobblestone floor. Sure enough, Megan had been telling the truth, there was a playground just around the corner in the gigantic central commons area of the court yard. Instead of the various cliques and social clubs that meandered around the space, there was an entire play set: Monkey bars, swings, slides, merry go rounds, and yes, ball pits were all accounted for. Older adults in their late twenties and early thirties were manning the equipment, supervising the swings and bounce house and what not,

but everyone Kelsey's age was playing with gusto. The college senior didn't know how or why this was happening or what campus group had sponsored this, and didn't care right now.

"Come on, let's go!" Kelsey motioned to her suddenly best friend, and broke off in a run, only to stop a few steps in when she realized that Megan wasn't following her.

Megan had stopped in her tracks and was clutching her belly. "Hold on," Megan grunted. "Gotta...poop."

"Oh," Kelsey shrugged, "fair enough." Kelsey turned her back to scan for a toilet. Now where were the bathrooms? Kelsey couldn't quite remember, having a bit of a shy bladder anyways. Needing to heed nature's call typically meant Kelsey was headed back home to relieve herself. She turned around back to Megan, sure that the R.A. would know where the nearest public restroom would be, but Megan hadn't moved from that spot.

The taller girl was squatting down, her butt pushing out in the most exaggerated slow motion twerk. Her face was a mask of concentration. "What are...?" Kelsey began to ask, but she didn't have time to finish the question.

"POOOOOOOPIE!"

Kelsey watched in horror as rude, flatulent sounds burst out of Megan's backside, a distinct lump forming in the back of the taller girl's pants for an instant. Bile rose up in the back of Kelsey's throat when the smell hit her nose. Kelsey hadn't realized it before, but there was a decided puffiness all around Megan's nether regions that was vaguely distinguishable even through the cover of the shorts. The strain left Megan's face, and then she stood up to her full height as if nothing had happened. Megan looked toward Kelsey and said, "Okay. All done." She sighed with relief before enthusiastically adding, "Let's go play!"

"Did you just poop?" Kelsey asked, aghast.

"Yeah," Megan nodded. "I really had to go." Kelsey waited for more of an explanation, but Megan wasn't volunteering any.

Kelsey was so puzzled and disgusted she felt she might go cross eyed. "You knew you had to poop?"

Everybody's- not-fun-twenty-two-year-old-mom-away-from-home seemed to take this as a compliment. "Thank you, my mommy says I'm advanced." She smiled proudly.

"You just pooped yourself," Kelsey pointed out.

"I'll get changed later. First I wanna go play."

“You’re wearing a diaper,” Kelsey’s tone was more than a little accusatory.

“Yeah,” Megan agreed, completely missing Kelsey’s tone and point. “That’s what we wear.”

Kelsey scoffed. “We?” There was no we. There was Kelsey, and then there was THIS loon.

“Forever babies.” Megan replied. Megan wasn’t alone in being diapered either, it seemed. There were other kids...other men and women her age dressed even more childishly than she preferred. She saw onesies, not footie pajamas, but shirts that buttoned at the crotch on a few people. One girl in particular had ruffles on her bottom, the leg gathers of a diaper not quite covered up by the big baby garment. Others, Kelsey noticed were running around in just T-shirts and diapers. One or two didn’t even have a t-shirt, and those were girls.

What was going on?

“I’m not wearing a...” Kelsey gestured down to herself. Her eyes glanced downward to compare her state of dress to her peers’ and paused. That’s when she noticed the padded bulge encasing her, noticeable even through her sturdy denim shorts. She bent over, hearing the distinct crinkle the movement created, and traced a line of buttons running along the inseam of both legs and up between her legs. Little glimpses of something white and puffy shown through the folds between buttons.

Crotch snaps? It couldn’t be!

Kelsey stood back up, unable to look at herself. Her cute little outfit had turned into something meant for toddlers with the appearance of just a few buttons. That’s when she noticed that her stance was just a little bit wider than it normally was thanks to the special underwear wrapped around her ass. “...diaper?!”

How had that gotten there? How had any of this happened? She was about to ask the R.A. more questions, but the taller girl had already walked off, poop pants and all. Kelsey wanted to run after her, and call out for help. To make some sense of the nonsense that her life had suddenly been turned into.

There was just one problem.

Kelsey had to poop, too.

Somewhere very far away, a being older than Earth itself- a god in some cultures- smiled dreamily at the little blue and green marble off in the distance...and yawned contentedly before going back to sleep.

## CHAPTER 2

*Now I know what you're thinking, dear friend, and no, it's not because I have some kind of psychic powers (even though I do). It's because people always ask this question at the revelation of the nature of magic and humanity's potential. It's a natural question: If magic, as we've come to understand it, is just a matter of people "believing and wanting" hard enough, then why, Cornelius, is folklore filled with so many accounts of bad things? Dragons, trolls, demons, vampires, and other things that go bump in the night. If we, humanity, created these gods, why do they punish us so? Why are men so often the servants instead of the masters? You don't have to be an award winning paranormal psychologist (like me) to answer that one: Humanity as a whole is full of hate and self-loathing in equal measure. Dragons pop up to guard treasure from enemies. A vampire sets its sights on a rival. A troll sets up its shop under a bridge that leads away from your shop. But weapons, especially magic ones, are far too often indiscriminate, and can spin crazily out of their creator's control.*

*More interesting are the reasons why good things go bad; the monkey's paw, the treacherous djinn, and so on. Magic is a reflection of the human psyche. It's more than just conscious thought made manifest, it's everything about us made manifest, unconscious included. And just as our id pushes us to go after the things we want, our superego restrains us and gives us reason not to.*

*Sometimes it's a little bit of both. The monsters rise up because a bored would-be hero needs something to conquer and triumph over. (You'll notice that there was substantially less international war when there were monsters to fight.)*

*Other times, magic is a human being unconsciously bending reality to punish themselves in act of penance. Going through the desert without food or water for over a month, for example. Or vultures tearing at our flesh day by day only to have it grow back.*

*So why does the God of the old testament punish when the same God of the New Testament is infinitely forgiving? Because at the time, it's what we thought we deserved.*

- *An excerpt from "Do You Believe in Magic?" by Cornelius Crowley.*

1.

**Susan**

What did I do to deserve this? The question kept echoing again and again in Susan's mind as spoonful after spoonful of disgusting yellow-brown mush pushed its way past her lips. The taste of corned beef and sauerkraut drenched in thousand island dressing and pureed into a semi-solid invaded every corner of her mouth.

Susan was in what was very likely her own personal hell. First off, she was in the girliest, pinkest, frilliest dress that she could ever possibly conceive of. Susan hated girly clothes, dresses especially. She might have put her natural athleticism to good use and run, except for

the adult sized wooden high chair that was keeping her legs confined and her arms pinned at her sides.

Because of this, the tomboy could do little more than just keep gulping down corned beef and sauerkraut while her mother kept spooning it in. The half-eaten Reuben on her plate had somehow metamorphosed into a half full jar of Reuben baby food- serving size: adult- and her mom was force feeding it to her almost faster than she could swallow the vile stuff. The sandwich had been a little dry. The gunk that Mom was spooning into her mouth made Susan think of a baby bird being fed its mother's vomit.

Speaking of baby animals, that was another bizarre monkey wrench thrown into Susan's fight and/or flight plan. Her shirt had melted into the gaudy monstrosity clinging to her bust. Meanwhile, her pants and panties had been replaced by a full-fledged diaper. The dress, she was able to feel with her fingers, didn't even cover the damn diaper all the way. Her new and unexpected underwear wasn't even really under anything.

Even if she somehow managed to slip out of the highchair, running with the diaper on would completely throw off her stride and she'd have a better chance of falling flat on her face than making any meaningful escape attempt. Taking it off was out of the question. She'd been trying. For some reason she couldn't completely fathom, her fingers lost all strength and dexterity the moment she even touched the thick padding currently spreading her legs apart.

At least it all of the extra cushioning made the wooden seat a bit more comfortable. At least she hadn't pissed or shit herself. At least she wasn't forced to sit in a wet or messy diaper...yet. Susan had a nasty suspicion that's where this was heading. She wouldn't put it past Janet to plan that. Likely, there was more in that jar than just pureed sandwich. Janet- Susan refused to consciously think of her mother as anything but...not if she could help it- was behind this. What this was, or what the point of it was, was completely beyond her, but Susan knew in her heart of hearts that Janet was responsible for this predicament. The complete lack of outrage, that crack about growing old but not growing up; the complete lack of surprise when her panties became babyish and disposable; the fact that right now Susan was having to do her best not to throw up pickled sauerkraut; it all pointed to Janet having known about her daughter's reluctance to join the family business, and she had clearly taken steps to dissuade, if not all-out punish her.

Wasn't this all a little bit extreme, though? Really? Couldn't she just have been cut out of the will or gotten shouted at? "You're no daughter of mine" or something? To be fair though, were Susan's suspicions all that rational?

If anyone else had told her that their mother had transformed their clothes into giant versions of baby clothes- diaper included- and were force feeding them in a giant highchair in front of everyone, all because they didn't want to continue the family business, she would signed them up for the tin-foil hat club.

Maybe this was some bizarre form of food poisoning. Maybe this was all a bad dream, and Susan would wake up in a hospital bed in the E.R., muttering about having the strangest dream. Susan could only hope.

Susan could have grinned and bore all of this bizarre nonsense a bit better too, if not for the other people in the building. That was the worst part; the other people. Susan had picked that table to get a quick bite to eat so she could break the news to Janet and then zip out before they could get into a proper shouting match. Now that she was dressed like a toddler and being fed like one to boot, she was front and center stage. Everyone who came in and out of Ma's Diner could see her.

As for the regulars: The old people? The local cops? The waitresses and the other usual suspects? They were cool with it. They were in on the joke. No one so much as flinched. An elderly couple paid their tab and even waved "bye-bye" to Susan as they left. There wasn't even a hint of condescension in their eyes. Not even a snigger on their lips. She might as well have been a real baby. Had her mother hired professional actors or something? Waitresses kept taking orders, people kept eating, and the grill kept firing away, and no one either noticed or minded that a twenty-two-year-old woman was being force-fed in a highchair and diaper at the front of the room.

"Oh Mommy! Look!" a high-pitched voice caused Susan to whip her head sideways, smearing sandwich sauce over her right cheek. "It's a forever baby!" A woman and her daughter- a first grader tops- had just walked through the door. The kid was pointing. "She's so cute!"

Forever baby?

The tomboy in the frilly pink dress stared down her nose at the little brat as her mother wiped her cheek with a napkin. "My name is Susan," she growled.

The kid was completely unfazed. "Hi Susan! I'm Makenzie!" Her hand was a back and forth blur. "Hi Susan! Say hi! Hi! Say hi, Susan! Say hi!" Even this one was in on it. Dejectedly, Susan sighed and said, "...Hi..."

"Yay!" the little girl clapped her hands. "Good girl!" The two parents began talking over their respective offspring. "She's adorable," the customer said to 'Ma.'

"Thank you," Janet replied.

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-two. Twenty-three in a few months."

“Oh, you are so lucky!” the stranger gushed.

“Yes, I am,” Mom agreed.

The little girl started tugging at her mother’s pant leg. “Mommy, Mommy! Why are forever babies so old?”

The mother stifled a giggle before saying, “Twenty-two isn’t particularly old, Makenzie.”

“Older than me.”

“Well,” the mother thought for a moment. “Getting older and growing up aren’t always the same thing.”

That did it! That! Did! It! Susan needed no further proof at that moment to know that her mother- no fuck that; Janet- had been the cause and the reason behind all of her humiliation. This was no fever dream. The “how” of things she was still fuzzy on; though this town was still conservative enough that a dose of good ol’ fashioned public humiliation was something most people could get behind, including the local cops. Nothing was out of the realm of possibility right now.

Maybe not “nothing;” she still had no idea how the highchair had come alive and grown to fit her in it, or how her casual jeans and a t-shirt combo had turned into some frilly pink mess, but thinking about that sent shivers up her spine and Susan preferred anger over fear at this moment in time. Better to just be angry at the bitch behind all this.

Susan looked away from the mother and little girl gawking at her and turned to face the woman with the rubber tipped spoon and the jar of Reuben baby food, “Jan-“

WOOOMF!

The spoon was past her lips, the revolting preservative filled mush oozing on her tongue. “There we go Susie!” Janet cooed. “Three more bites, baby girl, and then it’ll be time for your nap.” But Susan did not swallow. She would not be taking three more bites. Fuck that. With hate filled eyes and puffed out cheeks, Susan spat the yellow brown paste back at her mother. Not even unusually quick reflexes and fast draw on a napkin could completely save Janet’s dress.

“Ooops,” the mother with the little girl chuckled, covering her mouth slightly as Janet began dabbing at her soiled dress. “I guess someone’s done eating.” Damn right.

“Baaaaad baby!” The term from the first grader wasn’t a rebuke, but more of a commentary. Inwardly, Susan agreed. She was being a bad baby. Adults, by definition, make for bad babies.

Janet didn't lose her cool. She didn't even frown. Her brow wasn't the slightest bit furrowed. Instead, she looked at the customers that had just stopped by and said "I guess someone isn't ready for their nap, either." This got a good-natured chuckle from the woman, and her little girl giggled the way little kids tend to when they don't really get the joke. Then she told them, "Flo will see you to your seats."

The two gawkers let Susan be and went to order their meal while 'Ma' fiddled with the tray chair. "Didn't like that, did you?" Susan said, a feeling of petulant triumph building up. "No I did not," was Janet's curt reply- each word standing tense and upright like a little soldier- as she undid the tray. "You hurt my feelings. Now say you're sorry, Susie."

Susan scoffed. "Uh...no." Now that her hands were free, Susan took the opportunity to cross her arms in contempt to properly complete her pout. "You apologize." Her glasses were starting to slide down her nose a bit, but she didn't dare adjust them and ruin the moment.

It was Janet's turn to scoff. "For what?"

"Seriously?" Susan asked. "For this," she indicated the frilly pink mess clinging to her torso; "and this," she lightly tapped on the wooden highchair, "and that," she pointed accusingly at the now mostly empty jar of baby food. "Oh, and this!" She didn't even have to lift the hem of her dress to point at the monstrosity strapped to her hips.

"Susie, I have no idea what you're so mad about. You look very pretty today, honey." Janet pursed her lips for a second and added, "That's your favorite highchair, you wanted the Reuben, and I just checked your diaper." Then as an afterthought she added, "If you want, I can check you again." Her mother's right hand began making a bee-line for Susan's crotch.

Susan slapped it away, the sound of skin on skin ringing through the air like a cracked whip. The entire diner fell silent at the sound. Everyone looked up from their plates. The diapered tomboy looked back at them in contempt. So THIS was crossing the line? "Alright, fuck it," Susan stood up and stepped down from the highchair, her pink sneakers smacking against the floor as she did, the rustle of the diaper and the fluttering of the too short dress making her hyper aware of even the most miniscule of movements. "I'm out. You've made your point. Older doesn't mean grown-up. You've had your fun. Now I'm out."

The poor girl didn't even make it three steps towards the door before she felt an iron grip on her wrist yanking her backwards. "Susan Leann Collins," the voice at the end of that manacled grip told her, "you stay right there!"

During her freshman year of college, Susan took a comparative religion course mostly for grins. When the class veered off into decidedly less mainstream religions- voodoo, wicca, shamanism and the like- Susan had a brief fascination with the occult. It was definitely a phase that she grew out of, and she didn't put any stock in the stuff, but she had some fun reads anyways.



It was more of a guilty pleasure than anything, much in the same way people read about the exploits of cults and serial killers; not because they are cultists or serial killers themselves, but there's a kind of morbid satisfaction that normal, boring people can get from reading about the bizarre, objectively evil, and naively stupid. One thing led to another, and she eventually came across this book of complete schlock talking about magic as if it were a real thing. That magic happened as long as we believed hard enough or something.

Most of it was pseudo-science occult psychobabble but there was one particular part that resonated with her as an odd kind of universal truth: the power of names. If you knew something's true name you could bind it, paralyze it, make it serve you. Clearly, the author of that book had had a mother like Janet.

Calling her "Susie" was a jab on her mother's part these days. Calling her by her first and either of her two other names was a dire warning. Using her full name meant that she had crossed some sort of line and things were about to go downhill fast unless Susan tread very carefully. It was an invocation that to this day still caused her to lock her knees and freeze in place. Just like magic, Susan Leann Collins didn't dare move.

With a quiet voice and an iron hand holding Susan secure, Janet leaned in and hissed, "Now I do NOT know what has gotten into you today, young lady, and I do not normally condone spanking, but if you keep sassin' me like that I WILL take you over my knee in front of all these people right now and spank whatever it is right outta yer little tushie. Do. You. Understand?" A little bit of southern cracker drawl had snuck its way into Janet's accent, as it did most every time when she was angry or when Susan's Grandma was around. The way she said the words scared Susan just as much as the words themselves. This was no bluff. She'd do it.

The young woman dressed like a toddler princess looked at her mother and around the dead quiet room, all eyes on them. She had forgotten how strong her mother could be, especially when angered. It would be a wonder if there wasn't bruising on her wrist when this was done. "Do...you...understand?" Janet repeated.

"Yes Mommy," Susan squeaked, then immediately kicked herself for her choice of words. Ma'am would have sufficed, or Mom- anything appropriate deferential- but Mommy? What had she been thinking? The ridiculous outfit she'd been wearing most likely had manipulated her frame of mind. At least the few customers left had stopped staring and gone back to their tuna melts and liver with onions.

Her mom nodded. "Alright then," she said, before turning her head and calling to the back shouted. "Phyllis! Bring me Susie's diaper bag! We're going for a walk!" Diaper bag? Walk? As in she was going outside? Dressed like THIS?!

The poor girl's face almost matched her dress. The sound of the grill sizzling was drowned out by a pulsing pounding in her head. Phyllis, Mom's oldest employee and a woman who was

perpetually seventy if she was a day, toted over a large hot pink satchel with bunnies stitched in the front and handed it over. "You go get some fresh air, young'un and enjoy the ride." A withered, shaking hand that still had the ability to write down orders and dice vegetables with uncanny speed and accuracy, favored Susan with a slight pinch of her cheek, before the little old woman turned around and walked back the way she came.

Phyllis was so old that she'd known Susan since the first time she was in diapers, and that dainty little cheek pinch brought back at least a dozen half-forgotten memories; the kind where she wasn't sure if she actually remembered them, or had been told about them enough through the years that she remembered the stories more than the events themselves. A feeling not much different than a rock hitting the bottom of an empty well landed in Susan's stomach. Things were about to get so much worse.

Slinging the pink satchel...diaper bag...satchel over her shoulder, Janet began walking for the door, pulling her daughter behind her. "C'mon baby girl. Let's go for a walk." Still cowed into submission by threats of pain and embarrassment, Susan followed, her dress swishing, diaper crinkling, and legs waddling every step outside.

A large- comically large, in fact- umbrella stroller was parked just outside the doors; no doubt about who it was intended for. Susan didn't dare resist as she was guided into the hammocklike wheelchair. Two straps fastened over her shoulders and clicked together in the middle of her chest. A third buckled up between her legs, the flat nylon rope pressing up against her padded crotch, giving a thorough and constant reminder of her so-called underwear.

The dress would be no help here. How could anyone even call this puffy sleeved monstrosity a dress, anyway? It was more for show than concealment.

Mom gave Susan a quick check over once she'd been buckled into her rolling humiliation-mobile, and nodded, more to herself than to anyone else. Still leaning over her daughter, Janet plucked a sizable baby bottle out of a side pocket of the diaper ba-...the pink satchel, and placed it in the young woman's lap. "Something to wash your lunch down with, baby." Janet disappeared behind the stroller and soon the grainy grinding sound of rubber wheels on concrete whispered Susan's departure from the safe and private confines of her mother's diner.

Unable to let the plastic bottle just sit in her lap, Susan turned the foreign object over in her hands, sloshing the not quite ivory liquid around as she did so. It was milk, obviously, but not quite; something seemed off about it. It seemed thicker, and the color was a little darker, closer to a vanilla milkshake. A protein shake perhaps, or maybe it was raw and unpasteurized? Goat milk? Not that it mattered. Susan wasn't about to stick the damn rubber nipple in her mouth and find out.

“OH MY GOD!” a cooing shriek snapped out of her analysis and swiveled her head around. Suddenly disoriented, she took a moment. While Susan had been distracting herself with the contents of a baby’s beverage holder, her surroundings had changed considerably. To her right was the street, to her left, the parking lots and storefronts of the few non-franchised stores left in town. Road signs and familiar landmarks signaled that they’d made it a block or two. Up ahead was the turnoff for the public library.

Susan’s eyes found the source of the high-pitched exclamations. Standing in front of her, was a broad shouldered but attractive young woman in her late twenties or early thirties. Her glasses, almost identical to Susan’s and the thick turtleneck sweater gave her the air of an academic despite her witless and star struck expression. She looked older than Susan, but not by a whole lot; much in the same way that high schoolers didn’t quite look like college kids, and college kids didn’t quite look like adults out in the working world. The difference would have been small and ultimately unimportant under normal circumstances. These were not normal circumstances. “Is that Susan?” the stranger asked Susan’s mother. “I almost didn’t recognize her!”

Another rock crashed in the well of Susan’s stomach. This stranger knew her somehow, from where didn’t matter, and now she was participating in this discombobulating punishment she’d somehow earned. The stranger looked down, expectantly at her, all smiles. “Hi Susan!” she cooed. “It’s good to see you. Do you remember me? Do you?”

There was something familiar about her, but Susan had never been particularly good at remembering faces. The woman waving her hand in front of Susan’s nose just kept smiling and waving, expecting it to jog her memory. “Linda used to babysit you when you were younger, remember?” Mom offered.

Linda?...Linda.... Linda!

More memories, long ago filed away and gathering dust bubbled up to the forefront of the diapered girl’s mind. She’d been eight. Linda had been sixteen. It hadn’t been a huge difference in age, but it was big enough to where Linda had been given authority over a young Susan while Mom went out on dates. Linda had been an objectively good babysitter for those two years before she went off to college; neither too permissive, nor too authoritarian. She neither neglected the girl that Susan was, nor treated the eight- year-old as an incompetent child. Today was a completely different scenario.

For most, it’s awkward enough meeting former teachers and caregivers after they’ve grown up and come into their own. Everyone tends to remember the child that a person used to be rather than the adult that they are, much to the younger person’s chagrin. For Susan, the contrast between the adult she was and the child she had been was suddenly less stark. If Janet was behind this...this...this whatever it was- a notion that was seeming more ludicrous as each event unfolded- she had certainly taken a lot of care and preparation in executing it.

Nervous, embarrassed and needing something to look busy with, the young woman in the stroller slipped the nipple of the baby bottle into her mouth. “Winda?” she mumbled around the rubber teat as she sank down into the canvas of the stroller as best as the restraints would allow her.

“She’s feeling shy, right now,” Mom’s voice explained from behind the babied woman. The other woman beamed and let out a sympathetic “Awwwww,” as she stood and smoothed out her sweater, making eye contact with Susan’s mother. “She’s so sweet.”

“She normally is,” Janet agreed.

A playful smirk danced across the third woman’s lips. “Normally?” She stole a faux disapproving glance back down to Susan, sneaking a wink in. Without thinking about it, Susan timidly pulled on the rubber nipple with her lips, causing the contents to dribble onto her tongue.

The milk tasted like regular milk. Maybe a little sweeter and a little more watered down than usual, but otherwise it tasted like regular old moo-cow milk. It was a bit like how she liked her coffee, lots of cream and sugar, but someone had goofed and forgotten to add the coffee beans. Still, perfectly serviceable. Susan tilted the bottle up and took another sip.

“She’s just being a little fussy today,” Janet spoke to Linda, “can’t say why.” The fear of an escalated and very physical punishment still burning in her brain, Susan chose to hold her tongue and kept sucking down her watered-down milk.

Susan’s old babysitter nodded thoughtfully. “Yeah. Phillip does that, too, from time to time. I think it’s a Forbies thing.”

“Forbies?” Mom asked.

“Forever babies,” the lady clarified. “Kind of a nickname on the internet.” They were talking about Susan as if she weren’t there, talking over her head. As if she couldn’t understand, or if her opinion didn’t matter. More than the infantile outfit; more than the stroller or the bottle; it was these micro-signals that everyone had been sending her, these little things that made the young independent woman feel incredibly...small.

Susan popped the bottle out of her mouth. “Forever babies?” she echoed Linda. That made the second person she’d heard mention that phrase. Something wasn’t adding up. Susan’s whole theory on the how and why she’d ended up like this was disintegrating in her mind. She sat back up in the stroller and looked to her mother.

A condescending head pat was what Susan was rewarded with. “Finish your bottle, Susie. Grown-ups are talking.” The diapered girl’s face flushed red, and Susan felt her blood boil with anger. A look from her mother lowered Susan’s impending tantrum into indignant pouting. Susan bit into the nipple of her bottle and busied herself sucking down the sweet watered-down

milk. If she'd bitten her lip, she very well may have drawn blood. "See what I mean?" Janet asked Linda.

WHOOSH.

A passing car alerted Susan that there were more than just two sets of eyes out here in the open looking at her in her present condition. Susan sank back down as far as she could, hoping the stroller would at least hide her face.

"So, how's Phillip? How are your parents?" Janet asked the other 'grown-up'.

Linda nodded. "Phillip's good. Mom and Dad still love having him around. It's given me the chance to grow up and strike out on my own, guilt free. No chance of empty nest syndrome, y'know?"

"Yeah," Mom let out a contented, lazy sigh. "I do indeed." It was almost like she was purring.

Susan felt a twinge in the last place she currently wanted to feel a twinge. When was the last time she'd gone to the toilet? This morning after breakfast? Or was it just before lunch? Under normal circumstances it wouldn't have mattered. Under normal circumstances, she wouldn't be strapped to a rolling chair with pixie decorated padding touching her nethers. "Uh..Janet..." Susan spoke up.

Janet seemed unconcerned and continued talking with the woman not much older than her daughter. "Playing at the park today, I assume?"

"Nah," Susan's ex-babysitter replied. "There's a special event going on at the college today. University is doing outreach and special services as fundraisers. Enrollment has been down the last couple of years because...y'know." Mom nodded in reply. Apparently, she knew that, too.

"Jan?" Susan tried to interrupt, the need to go becoming an uncomfortable, swelling, almost burning sensation. She stopped sucking on the bottle. Why the hell had she kept sucking on the bottle? Why had she chosen to suck on the bottle in the first place?

"Oh that's nice!" Janet talked over Susan. "If I had known, I would have taken the day off and taken Susie. How are you though? What are you up to?"

"I'm walking to work. I'm a librarian, now. In a day or two, they're doing a forever babies' read-in day."

"Oh, Susie would love that!"

The need, whether it was a physiological or psychological- an actual fullness of her bladder or just an itch that got worse the more one thought about it-it was there and growing. Her body

was screaming at her for release. “Mother?” Susan spoke up a little bit louder. Her voice more of a groan. “Mothersrrrrr?”

Susan’s mother kept the conversation going despite Susan’s wriggling and obvious growing discomfort. “I really should take Susie over to the Library more often. Now, it’d be an extra treat, considering that you’re there.”

“Mom?” Not much time left.

Linda added “I don’t mind sitting for her again, either. I could use the extra money, too. Librarians don’t make a whole lot of money.”

“Mommy?” Out of time. Susan’s bladder betrayed her. A flood of warm wet liquid gushed out of her involuntarily, her body disobeying every screaming command her mind issued. The dripping warmth splashed against her privates before the thirsty padding wicked it away and absorbed it, the strap between her legs forcing the garment up against her the whole time. A sigh of relief mixed with a shudder of revulsion as the tomboy publicly debased herself.

The conversation halted. Both women looked down at the captive girl. Mommy gave an exasperated sigh. “Yes, Susie?”

“I...” Susan stuttered, her face flushing and her breath catching. “I peed.”

Mom’s response: “Oh, is that all?” Those few words hurt Susan more than anything else uttered thus far. Is that all? As if her problems didn’t matter? Is that all? As if she had no right to feel as awful as she felt in that moment. Is that all?

“I just pissed myself,” the poor girl choked out, her voice cracking and tears pooling in her eyes.

Her mother’s first response was “Susie! Language!” Then Mom looked at the other grown-up and apologized. “I have no idea where she’s getting that from. I’m going to have to keep an ear out.”

Susan was crying openly now. “I just pissed my pants!”

“Honey. Don’t talk like that,” Janet chided. “You didn’t piss yourself. You just went pee-pee. You’re wet is all. And you’re not even wearing any pants, silly goose.” A wave of sobs racked Susan’s body as she thrashed impotently in the stroller.

“Thinking about potty training?” Linda asked Janet, indicating Susan’s outburst.

“Oh, that’s a fad.” Janet waved the idea off. “Forever babies can never be fully potty trained, anyways.” A beat. “Why? Is Phillip potty training?” Linda could only giggle and shook her head.

“Okay, Linda. It was nice running into you, but I think Susie here needs some more stroller time.”

Now with a wet diaper pressed against her, Susan continued being pushed down the sidewalk. As the urine in her diaper cooled, so did her temper. But there was no perspective or rationalization; no clarity that came as her pulse lowered and her breathing slowed. Confusion would be too strong a word for what Susan was feeling; instead a kind of questioning, almost dream-like haze settled over her.

As the stroll continued, more people passed by getting a good look at the girl in all her shame. Even the ones who Mom didn't stop to talk to made sure to comment about the 'baby' in the stroller.

“Hey there, cutie!”

“Awwwww! What an adorable outfit!”

“Such a pretty little girl!”

Cutie? Adorable? Pretty? How could that be? Susan Collins had been called a lot of things in her life, most of them complimentary- attractive, sleek, and on one drunken occasion, seductive- but she could never remember being referred to as something so...so...girly! Furthermore, the diaper had swelled, a fine crease pressing into the strap separating her legs and there was more than a slight discoloration where the majority of her accident had been absorbed. How could anyone be “cute” or “pretty” like that?

All the same, Susan couldn't help but hide her face behind her hands with each new compliment and cooing from the random passerby. She couldn't even bear to uncover her eyes after a point; better to just let this trip pass in darkness. Her ears were not immune, however, and the muffled footsteps and polite greetings of passersby and the engines of automobiles did nothing to lessen her blush. They were looking at her. They were all looking at her.

“Oh, hi Susan!” That voice! She knew that voice!

Susan unshielded her eyes and followed the voice to its source. It was coming from behind her. The tomboy leaned out of the stroller and craned her neck. “What are you looking at, baby?” her mother asked. Susan wasn't so sure herself.

They had arrived at the bus stop along Pennsylvania Avenue, just before the turnoff on North South Drive. Apparently, Mom had only been taking her around the block. On the bus stop bench, lounging in an older woman's lap, was a girl that Susan had seen only yesterday.

“Vanessa?”

Vanessa Carlyle was a junior, but they had taken some of the same math classes and had helped each other cram for exams in the past. They weren't particularly close, and had never socialized beyond one helping the other studying, but they knew each other. The young woman with her head in what could only be her mother's lap did so wearing nothing but a baby blue shirt with matching bonnet, booties, and of course, a diaper. "Hiya," she repeated.

The stroller slowed to a stop and backed up a few steps. "What in the hell are you doing?"

The college junior didn't seem to notice the tone of accusation in which she'd been asked. "Oh, y'know. Just waitin' for a bus with my Mommy; gettin' some milk." A white strand of liquid clung to the right corner of the other girl's mouth. Just like Susan, a bottle of creamy liquid was tightly grasped between two otherwise very adult hands; the yellow nipple speckled with milk and glistening with saliva. The older woman looked to Vanessa, then to Susan, and back to Vanessa.

"Vanessa," the older woman said, "Finish your ba-ba before the bus gets here."

A "Okay, Mommy" was uttered before the twenty-one-year old in the baby gear lifted the bottle back to her lips and started slurping at the rubber teat, making little animal mewling sounds as she; her mother all the while cradling her head and gently rubbing her ears. This wasn't a prank. This wasn't a mind fuck. No way this was a performance.

If there was any doubt left in Susan's mind of that fact, what happened next dispelled the idea completely. Still lying down, Vanessa lifted her knees till they were almost touching her chest and began grunting, her lips still pulling the bottle nipple.

Vanessa's mother turned her head and noticed what was going on. "You wanna stop drinking for a second?" A guttural grunt, uttered by silly, sweetly smiling lips and slightly shaking head was the only response Vanessa gave.

A final "Uuuuh" moaned out of Vanessa's throat as the back of her diaper expanded in a lumpy bubble. The twenty-one-year old let out a quiet sigh as she lowered her legs down, likely spreading the newly deposited contents in her diaper. She only sucked harder on the bottle as a result.

Vanessa had just messed herself and couldn't be bothered to stop drinking milk in the process. A gust of wind, and the smell it carried with it, cemented this fact in Susan's mind. Susan's own rubber nipple found its way back to Susan's lips if only to drown out the putrid taste that the wind had carried with it.

"Whew!" Vanessa's 'Mommy' exclaimed with a cringe. "Someone made a stinky. Was it you? Was it you?!" She sniffed again, and then stopped cooing at her adult daughter. "As soon as you're done, it'll be time for a change."

Susan's peer mumbled around the nearly empty bottle. "Uh-fay!"



Janet decided to insert herself in the conversation. "It seems our little girls know each other."

"They must go to the same daycare," the other mother replied; a notion that was reinforced as the girl in the bonnet wiped her mouth off and nodded her head, wiping the last trails of milk and spittle from her lips.

The mothers ignored her input as much as if the "little girl" might not know what she was talking about. "Big Little?" Janet asked.

"That's the one," the other middle-aged woman replied.

Mom extended her hand. "Janet Collins."

Vanessa's mother glanced to Susan, still in a kind of subdued shock, before taking the hand and shaking it politely. "Martha Williams," she said. "Now if you excuse me, my little stinky butt here needs a change." For her part, Vanessa just giggled as if "little stinky butt" were a term of endearment. Vanessa's mother slid out from beneath her and grabbed at a bag that had been resting between her feet. She took out a cutesy printed diaper that was far too big for any child to wear; while like a toddler who had long grown used to the routine, Vanessa stretched out on the bench, and reached her hands to the sky, as if preparing to grasp at something that wasn't there yet.

"So how old is she?" Mom asked while the other mom dug out a pack of baby wipes, and a ring of rainbow colored plastic keys. Susan just gawked stupidly, as her college aged peer grabbed at the fake keys and amused herself thumbing through them flailing them in the air; making them click-clack against each other.

Vanessa's mom rolled up her sleeves and replied, "Twenty-one." Her hands shot down and ripped the tapes of the diaper off. It felt as if Susan's eyes were about to fall out of her skull. No...they weren't going to...were they?

The poor girl couldn't stand it any longer. "Vanessa," a flabbergasted Susan asked, "what the fuck are you doing?" Vanessa's legs were being lifted into the air, her feces covered backside was out in the open air while her mother went to work. No one else was so much as flinching.

"Gettin' muh butt wiped," Vanessa replied, not even looking away from the plastic keys as she flipped one over top of the other in an endless loop. "Why?" It was as if Susan's question born out of shock and confusion was nothing more than a set up question; like when you ask a friend what they're up to tonight right before inviting them out for drinks.

If Susan had a retort or follow up question, it was drowned out by her mother's fearsome rebuke. "THAT'S IT!" Janet roared. "I WARNED YOU ABOUT THE POTTY MOUTH LITTLE GIRL!" The world was a blur of motion as Janet unbuckled Susan from her stroller, and sitting on the ground, took her daughter over her lap. Her feet hadn't even touched the ground before

she found herself face down looking at the concrete. A swift adjustment saw the hem of Susan's so-called dress flipped up and her ass sticking up above her head.

How had Mom gotten so strong?

Susan didn't have time to wonder long about that as her backside was suddenly pelted with stinging blows. Hornets were stinging her behind! She was being whipped! Even the thick padding of the did little cushion the beating. On instinct, her arms and legs flailed and kicked, her nails dug at the ground, as she tried to tear herself away from her mother's grip. A single forearm pinned her- belly down, ass up- to her mommy's lap.

Within seconds the mouthy tomboy was screaming out in pain...then crying out...then wailing...then bawling. She couldn't breathe! She was having to gasp for air just so that she could scream again. With fiery certainty the truth broke upon Susan: Mom wasn't playing games. This wasn't a dream. The entire world had gone mad.

A panicked, almost animal impulse took over. End the pain. End the pain. Apologize. Beg. Anything to make it stop. Anything for relief.

"I'm sorry!" the tomboy in the frilly dress cried out.

Janet stopped paddling. "What was that?"

"I'm sorry!" Susan repeated. "I'm sorry, Mommy!"

"For?"

"For...for being a potty mouth." Susan drooped her head in exhaustion and defeat.

There was a tense pause...then, "Okay, I think you've had enough, baby." Susan felt the weight of her mother's forearm ease off her, and Susan scrambled off, the grit of the concrete scraping against her sneakers. Mom was on her feet first and helped Susan to hers.

The distance between the bottom of her dress and the bottom of her diaper had increased. It sagged between her legs with a noticeable weight. Either she had wet more than she thought, or she had flooded the padding a second time during the thrashing she'd just received.

Vanessa sat up on the bench, a fresh diaper taped around her hips. "Potty mouth and potty pants!" she giggled as if she hadn't just had her own ass wiped moments ago.

"Maybe that's why she was being so fussy," the other middle aged woman offered. "I've known forever babies to act up when they need a change."

Mom shook her head, still holding Susan's hand. "Oh no. My little girl's been pushing it all afternoon" she said. "Can't say why." She looked at the lumpy padding dangling between her daughter's legs. "Though she could definitely use a change. Do you mind?"

The mother-daughter couple scooted away to clear a space. Petrified, Susan found herself moved and laid down on the same bus stop bench. Through some combination of exhaustion, terror, and maybe even reality itself pulling her down, Susan couldn't so much as sit back up while her mother fetched the hot pink diaper bag...satchel...no...diaper bag, and gathered the necessary supplies.

"Okay Susie, let's get you changed."

"Please no," she whimpered as Mom reached for the tapes. Her pleas fell on deaf ears.

2.

## **Dakota**

This was not the party that Dakota had walked out on. Not at all. The only thing that she recognized was the chocolate cake. Everything else was strictly toddler fare. Streamers, balloons, tables draped with plastic Sesame Street tablecloths along with matching paper plates and napkins littering them. People were even wearing those dorky little cone hats that strapped to the chin. A rendition of “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” played over the expensive sound system.

Things had taken a sudden and inexplicable turn for the strange, but by far the strangest part about the party were the people themselves. When she had lured Brendan into the guest room for a quick suck and fuck, Dakota knew for a fact that the dress code had been country club casual: Men in button up polos tucked into their khakis, women in breezy, flowing dresses that didn't give too much away but still tickled the imagination; heels optional but preferred. It's what had made Dakota's nearly skin-tight little number that much more of a standout.

Now, boys (fuck calling them men...it just didn't work) were in sneakers instead of loafers; some with the little lights that flashed with every step. (Did they really make those in adult sizes?) A few still had khakis on, though they were by and large shorts with noticeable bulges in the butt and crotch. If Dakota had any lingering doubt as to what lied beneath their pants, the tops of their diapers were sticking out of the wide elastic waistbands. The other boys wore plaid rompers, or shortalls (not just for girls anymore, apparently.)

Minutes ago, Brendan's female friends and relatives, as well as girlfriends of guy friends, had mingled naturally with the menfolk, all forming into little couples and cliques. Since the kiddie music had piped in, the girls had separated themselves from the boys almost entirely, and now two distinct groups had formed based around gender.

Every woman around Dakota's age was still wearing a dress, but they were less modest, less concealing, while still somehow managing not to be sexy in the least: Peter Pan collars and baby doll dresses with hems too short to hide bulky padded underwear; white tights stretched so thin anyone could still make out the cartoon character designs on the back of diapers; hair tied up with curly bows and ribbons. All of this flooded Dakota's vision.

Clothes and mouths across the room were smeared with bits of icing and chocolate cake, regardless of gender.

Along the periphery, a handful of older and middle-aged people (parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles) watched the gathering of young adults dressed as tots. They were smiling, and seemingly content, but with a look of caution in their eyes; as if they might need to intervene at

any moment. They were dressed less ridiculously than the twenty-something guests, but there was something distinctly different all the same; lots of jeans and old worn out t-shirts, stuff that they could afford to get dirty. Their constant, tired gaze reminded Dakota of the teachers guarding the punch bowl at every middle and high school dance she'd gone to.

Dakota, too, stood out. Her gorgeous blonde hair was now wrapped up in pigtails, her shoes were missing, and the sexy little red dress she'd worn had somehow shrunk to a Dora The Explorer T-Shirt, that stopped just short of her childish-looking diaper.

Her diaper?! Dakota looked down between her legs. Her panties had become something puerile and disgusting. Cartoon balloons and stars ran all along it from front to back as it sagged and swelled a bit from the pee it had just absorbed. It was a bright and happy façade to mask its repugnant purpose: to hold her piss and shit until someone could be bothered to replace it with another. Well...not HERS, per se, even though she was wet and the diaper had done its job...but...but...-Dakota felt flustered. Just because she had pissed herself without meaning to didn't mean she was childish or infantile or stupid, right? Right. She had bigger problems to worry about than suddenly pissy panties.

Still gawking at the transformed party, the would-be gold-digger glanced down at the Ring Pop that had been slid onto her finger. That had been an engagement ring before, hadn't it? A modest one, unfortunately, but it had been right. Her eyes traveled up her slender digits to her fingernails.

They'd changed too. Once they had been shiny and painted and well cared for and a little pointy. Now they were plain and boring and they looked a little chewed on. Was that a hangnail?

"Go on and play, Dakota dear." Brendan's mother gave her a slight nudge. "Go have fun. It's Brendan's big day, and he wouldn't want his little guests to be sad."

"Brendan?" Dakota echoed the name of her (right now) boyfriend. While Dakota had been busy taking in the strange sights and sounds (not to mention smells...she couldn't have been the only one who was wet, and all the baby powder in the world couldn't completely mask that scent), Brendan had waddled off with the other boys and was clumsily throwing around a big rubber ball, clapping like an imbecile with each toss and catch, regardless of success. She'd been completely forgotten.

Her? Forgotten? Impossible!

Another nudge from Mrs. Jay and Dakota instinctively dug her bare heels into the floor. "I...I...can't." Dakota stuttered. "I...I..." she trailed off. She couldn't bring herself to say "peed." "I'm...I'm..." The word "wet" wasn't going to work either. "My...my...di..." So close. Hands open she motioned to the padded bulk around her tight ass.

“Your diaper?” The word was like a gunshot to Dakota. Something about hearing it said out loud made this insane nightmare seem all the more real to her. The older woman’s hand reached between the young woman’s legs and gave a gentle squeeze. A scream caught in Dakota’s throat. She wasn’t used to being touched there (not unless it was her idea, and always behind closed doors), but some nagging, scared little voice inside her told her to be quiet. Dakota’s lungs shook with rage as a woman old enough to be her mother pulled back the waistband of her diaper and allowed herself a quick peek at Dakota’s ass. “You’re just a little wet, honey. You’re good for now.” Brendan’s mother closed the guest room door behind them and gave Dakota a playful swat on her bulkily padded behind. “Go on and play.”

Slowly, the young woman walked forward towards the assembled mass of adults dressed like children, the crinkle in her diaper sounding like a thousand garbage bags rustling around her bottom. Logically, she realized, she was the only one who could actively hear the noise; like chewing; but illogically she felt the whole room hearing it over the seventh chorus of Old MacDonald.

Through gritted teeth, Dakota whispered to herself. “You can do this. You can do this. It’s just like in middle school when you had your first couple of periods. It’s just like wearing a pad.” Crinkle...crinkle..squish. “Just like a pad.” A pad that was also underwear and decorated with cutesy little kiddie designs. Underwear that wasn’t actually UNDER anything. Underwear that had a load of her pee in it, and she had just been groped by her (right now) boyfriend’s mom out in the open where everyone could see. No one had ever “checked” her to see if her pad needed cha-

WOMP!

A rubber ball smacking against her skull broke Dakota’s train of thought. The ball was bulky enough that had it been on the ground, it could have doubled for one of those hippie hipster chair substitutes. It didn’t hurt as much as knock her off balance. She stumbled a few feet before losing balance and falling over, the squish of her wet diaper breaking her tumble.

A hand reached up and pulled her to her feet. “You okay? Any owies?”

“Owies?” Dakota shook her head to clear the cobwebs out. “Uh...no. I’m not hurt.” She looked into her boyfriend’s concerned face. “Brendan?”

“Yeah?”

“What’s going on here?”

“We’re playin’ catch.” Then he added, “You’re not so good at it, huh? It’s okay. You’re just a girl.” Just a girl? Just a girl?! What kind of grade-school sexism was that?! What next, that she had cooties?

Dakota managed to say “I was blindsided!” in defense just before another ball in her back sent her stumbling. The diapered boy she dated didn’t so much catch her as he gently pushed her back up to her feet, his hands getting a good feel of her breasts in the process. (What had happened to her bra?) Brendan, who would normally be blushing beet red and apologizing profusely for what had just happened, couldn’t be bothered to blink. Dakota, likewise, was too stunned to feel much as far as sexual tension or embarrassment. She spun around and looked at the creep who had just lobbed the giant globule at her head.

He was a full head taller than Dakota, and wore a loose-fitting button up romper that stopped at his knees; a kind of formal shirt and shorts all in one. “What’s the big idea?” she demanded. A stuck out tongue was his only reply.

“Quit it, Jean!” Brendan yelled at the man baby. “That’s not playin’ nice!”

“Do you wanna get cooties?” Jean replied. “Cuz that’s how you get cooties!” The ball had rolled back to him and he picked it up once more, clearly readying a third volley of attack.

Chivalrously, Brendan stepped in front of his girlfriend, the waddle in his step making him look nonetheless her knight in shining armor. “I’m twenty-two now, I don’t believe in cooties.” He said it with all the seriousness and know-it-all imperiousness of the kid spoiling Santa Claus for everyone else.

“Pppphhb,” Jean’s retort was nothing short of a full on raspberry; tongue out and flapping in the air. Then with a know-it-all smirk, he said “The girls are only here cuz your mommy made you invite them.” Dakota saw the hair on the back of Brendan’s neck bristle.

“That’s not true!”

“Oooooooo!” Jean exclaimed. “Brendan likes girls! Brendan likes girls!”

“DO NOT!” Brendan shouted. “Do not do not do not!” He turned to the side, and Dakota got a look at his face. He was biting his lip, and his face blushing a deep red. She’d seen Brendan that embarrassed before, but it was usually when she had him flustered and begging for more, like the nights they experimented with leather or cross dressing. What was he embarrassed of?

Things got quiet on the boy’s side of the room; Old Mac Donald had faded out and been replaced with Bingo. Dakota’s boy toy looked to her, then to his friend, then back to her. He

was embarrassed of her. She was the reason he was blushing so much. Just by being there, she was causing him distress and humiliation in front of his peers.

The douchebag that was acting like a two-year-old took up a call as old as childhood itself. “Brendan and Dakota, sitting in a tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G!” Others picked up the chant. ‘FIRST COMES LOVE! THEN COMES MARRIAGE...THEN COMES BRENDAN WITH THE BABY CARRIAGE!’

Quickly, Brendan turned all the way around to face his girlfriend. “Maybe you should just go and play with the other girls. They’re doing tea parties and other girly stuff that girls like.” The other boys got quiet and were all nodding in approval with hushed “Yeahs” echoing the sentiment.

Taken aback, the young woman in pigtails asked her beau, “Are...are you dumping me?” Brendan frowned as if Dakota had suddenly switched to a foreign language.

“Huh?” he said. “Dumping? Whaddya mean? I got some dump trucks outside if you wanna play with them, I guess. I’m playing catch with my friends right now. Just get out of here.” A few of the boys clapped. Dakota was shaking with anger. She’d never been dumped before. No one dumped her. She dumped them!

Not ten minutes ago, he’d been proposing marriage to her. Five minutes ago, he was ready to bone her in the guest room while all his friends, neighbors and relatives, waited and listened outside. Now, he couldn’t be bothered with her, his friends’ mocking opinions of her driving his decisions.

The most disturbing thing to her, however, more than suddenly being in pigtails and diapers, was the source of the rejection. Dakota was a girl. She had cooties. What was up with that? Had she been called a bitch, or a cunt, or a slut, she could have coped, or come up with a snappy comeback. But just for being a girl, she was suddenly being driven out from Brendan’s inner circle (that was playing catch...poorly). She had cooties. Dakota couldn’t get over that: That base-level, self-assured grade school brand of bullshit was literally too simple to debunk. How did you lose a battle of wits when your opponent was unarmed? When they were too dumb to feel pain, that’s how.

Confused, hurt, and numb to the strange new world that had flooded her very reality, Dakota did the only thing that had even a hint of meaning to her. “Screw you, Brendan Jay,” she shrieked. “Take your stupid ring back!” With full force and intent, she slid the Ring-Pop off of her finger and hurled it towards the ground. The candy jewel shattered on the ground into a dozen tiny pieces, scattered by the impact. Brendan looked like a curse had been cast upon him.

“MOMMY!” he cried, running off to the back of the house.



The entire room stopped for a heartbeat. “Ooooooooooooo!” The shocked and accusatory cry rose from the throats of every diapered party goer, staring at her. The grown-ups (No, not grown-ups!)- adults (other adults)- had been either too busy managing other twenty something’s acting like juvenile idiots to see the entire scene unfold, or watched on with funny smiles, as if Dakota’s actions and feelings were cute. They wore nostalgic “remember when” smiles on their faces.

Dakota huffed, and went over to the other side of the large living room where scattered tables, plastic tea pots, and dolls dominated the landscape. This time, the room was quiet enough, that Dakota was sure they COULD hear the crinkle in her diaper...if not for their own crinkles.

The former sex-kitten plopped down in a thick plastic chair, feeling as much as hearing the wet padding squelch beneath her bottom. “Fuck my life,” she cried into her hands, muffling the curse. This was wrong on so many levels. Dressed like a two-year old, soaking in her own piss, at a child-style birthday party AND she’d been dumped for the first time in her life.

God was punishing her. That was what was happening. She should have accepted the marriage proposal, stopped stringing the poor boy along, taken his love, and settled for being a gorgeous stay-at-home mom who only went on lavish spending sprees a few times a year. She’d been a brat and was being punished for it in the most literal way imaginable.

Or maybe the devil was teaching her a lesson. Her rebuff of Brendan’s advances had been strictly kid stuff. She should have said yes, allowed the party to kick into overdrive, and then leave Brendan sometime before the wedding. Either way, all of this topsy-turvy bullshit was both her fault and meant specifically to torment her.

Rationally, Dakota doubted it was as simple as some celestial or demonic being punishing her. She’d done this kind of thing at least twice before (though the third time is, of course, the charm). There was likely a much more complicated answer that was grounded somewhere in the reality that she’d been living in before her panties had become disposable. She was no Alice in Wonderland, though. One didn’t ask asylum inmates why everyone was acting so crazy. Dakota knew she wouldn’t have liked the answers, and they wouldn’t have helped.

The hollow clinky rattling of plastic on wood made Dakota look up from the safe darkness of her fingers and palms. A dainty, light pink plastic tea cup and matching saucer laid in front of her on the table. Beside her, a girl about Dakota’s age stood holding a plastic tea pot and a cheap French maid’s hat. “Tea?” she asked.

“Sure...” Dakota replied, eyeing the pot. Must’ve been iced tea, hence the lack of steam. The girl tilted the teapot over Dakota’s cup as Dakota watched, waiting for tea, water, Kool-Aid, vodka (please let it be vodka) SOMETHING to pour out.

Nothing came, but the girl tilted the pot up and stood back. "There you go," she said. "Careful, it's hot." Playing pretend. Of course. What else had she expected? With one backhanded sweep, Dakota brushed the little tea cup and saucer off the table, sending them clattering to the floor.

"Ooopsie!" the girl playing maid (Dakota had never bothered to learn the names of any of Brendan's little friends) said. She went down to her knees, and began mock scrubbing at the floor. "Darn spills. Tea never washes out. Never, never, never!"

Dakota sniffed disdainfully, and immediately regretted the decision to do so. Her nose wrinkled in disgust as something far more pungent than simple urine rammed itself up her nostrils. She took a hard look at the girl with the little maid hat pretending to scrub nonexistent tea stains. If the smell had been a signal, the lump in the diaper- evident even through the dark green party dress and white tights- had been a bonfire. "No way," Dakota whispered to herself. "Gross." Even vodka likely wouldn't have gotten the horrible taste out of the young woman's mouth.

Another woman in her late twenties, this one dressed like an adult, walked over and sniffed the air tentatively. She was Brendan's older cousin, if Dakota remembered the bevy of introductions made earlier that afternoon. She looked to Dakota as if she were a suspect (as if!), and Dakota felt herself shrivel up inside from panic. Soon enough, the lady regarded the girl on the floor- five years her junior, if that- and leaned over to examine the lump in the back of the other girl's plastic-backed panties. Dakota watched in morbid fascination as the woman gently patted the younger one's behind, then bent over and pulled back the diaper to take a look inside. If the girl playing maid minded, or even noticed the other woman violating her personal space and privacy, she gave no signal.

"Leslie," the woman checking the big baby's (because what else could you call her?) diaper, "let's go get changed. Okay?"

The diapered girl looked up from the floor, a pout forming at her lips. "I'm not Leslie," she whined. "I'm Matilda the Maid." She shifted from all fours, to sitting on the floor (smushing the feces in her panties around...disgusting!) and crossed her arms.

The more grown-up of the two rolled her eyes good naturedly and said, "Okay...Matilda the Maid. Do you want to come with me and get changed?" The girl sitting in her own shit seemed to consider it. "It's easier to clean if your diaper is clean," the other woman added.

"Okay," the girl (Leslie or Matilda or whatever) agreed. Brendan's cousin (right?...right) helped her to her feet and walked hand in hand with her to the back of the house where most of the bedrooms were located. A middle-aged man sitting along the edge passed a too-big-to-be-real diaper and a pack of wipes to the young lady in charge, and she received them without even breaking her stride. As she passed Dakota, she thought the older girl had giggled and whispered something under her breath. The hell did "Forbies" mean?

A hand landed on Dakota's shoulder. Slowly, she turned and looked up. "I saw what happened with Brendan," this new intruder into Dakota's crumbling sanity said. She had long black hair in braids with a blue dress that was appropriately reminiscent of the main character in a certain Lewis Carroll book. The outfit really did look cute on her, flirty even. It might have been sexy if not for the obvious bulge that everyone close to Dakota's age had. "That's a shame."

"Yeah," Dakota sulked. "It sucks."

"Nice boy, too." The girl in the Alice dress added. "One of the few ones that's not a total dumb-head."

"Yeah," Dakota agreed.

"You're real pretty, too."

"Thanks." Dakota smiled genuinely.

"It's a shame you don't LOOK pretty."

Dakota's smile instantly became shark like, her teeth daggers. "I have a feeling you don't know what words mean. You wanna try that again, sweetie?" She didn't move, didn't stir; was statue still. For the first time since she pulled down Brendan's pants to find a layer of thick padding with balloon decorations where his boxers should have been, Dakota felt in her element. She could play these catty little games.

The new girl seemed to sense this and began to backpedal. Grabbing her braids nervously, she clarified. "No, no, no. You ARE pretty," she said. Each word started tumbling over the next. "It's just that you're not exactly dressed up for this kind of party. Your Mommy and Daddy didn't even dress you up in something to cover your diaper. If this was a slumber party or a play date, you'd be fine, by the way. So you're very pretty," she paused and took a breath. "You just don't look your best."

Experienced at this kind of repartee Dakota didn't soften. She ignored the part about her mommy and daddy dressing her and analyzed the core of the statement: She was pretty but looked like a train wreck right now. "Some of us have a beauty that transcends clothing," she said in an oversweet, insincere tone that even someone dressed like a toddler could understand (bitch).

"Oh totally," the new girl agreed. Sensing Dakota's superiority, she was clearly rolling over and showing her throat. "Like a flower...or a cute teddy...or puppies." Okay...maybe she didn't QUITE understand. Still, Dakota's presence transcended whatever crazy had just enveloped

her world. Alice finished with a whimpering, almost mewling “Just a shame he didn’t want to play with you.”

“Whatever,” Dakota shrugged. “He’s probably gay, now, or something.”

“Probably.” The new girl wrapped one of her braided pig tails around her fingers before adding, “Gay? What’s gay?”

The queen bee stifled a groan. Of course she didn’t know what “gay” was. “Gay means he likes boys instead of girls.”

“Oh.” The girl in the baby blue dress said. “All boys are gay, then.” Dakota heard herself bark out a bitter laugh at that. Truer words were never spoken. Wisdom from the mouth of adult babes.

“Yeah, they are.”

The new girl latched onto this self-evident truth like a leech. “It’s like, when you’re alone with them on a play date they can be nice, but as soon as other boys come around, they don’t wanna play with you no more, but then they’re okay with laying down next to you during nap time, but when it’s play time they don’t remember nothin’ and are like I was just sleepin’ with you, and they don’t want to play house no more.” The new girl stopped herself from rambling further. “I’m Alice.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah,” she rolled her eyes. “The dress is not a coincidence. My Mommy and Daddy think it’s cute. They dress me up in it every excuse they get. It is a nice dress though.”

“It is,” Dakota allowed. “It works... for you.”

“Still, it makes me feel like I’m some little kid, or something. I hate being treated like I’m too little. You know what I mean?”

“You. Have. No. Idea.”

Alice looked at her immediate surroundings; at the boys who had now gotten to a raucous game of duck-duck-goose, at the girls still playing tea party, and more importantly, at the grown-ups who were monitoring them all. “Wanna do something grown-up?” she whispered conspiratorially

“Drink?”

“Nuh-uh.” Alice’s braids jangled as she shook her head. “Not thirsty.”

It took everything in the former mean girl’s willpower not to slap her own forehead. “Smoke?”

“Ewww...gross.”

“Then what?”

Alice’s hands snaked down into the little white front apron of her Alice in Wonderland outfit. From the pocket, she took out a tube of lipstick in one hand and a mascara wand in the other. “Got ’em from my Mommy’s purse. Wanna play with them?”

Logically, Dakota knew she shouldn’t. This wasn’t out of any desire to be “good”, but out of practicality. What difference would it make? She’d just be a giant baby with makeup on. Then again... she looked like a baby now, and everyone was treating her as such. Maybe, just maybe, if she looked more like an adult, things would reverse course. This was no time for logic; this was a time for sophistry. When in Wonderland, eat the mushrooms. She even had her very own Alice to guide her.

“Oh hell yes.” Dakota said.

“What?”

“Yes.” Dakota explained. “I said yes. C’mon. Bathroom. Now!”

### 3.

#### **Kelsey**

Kelsey had to poop. It wasn't extremely urgent...yet, but the need was growing. Seeing her RA squat and poop her pants right in the middle of everything must have done something to her. It was similar to the sensation one had on long car trips after seeing the sign for a rest stop. It was easy enough to ignore the need to go until the opportunity presented itself. Kelsey hadn't had to go... until she did, and now it was at the forefront of her mind and in no danger of going away. She had to find a toilet soon, or end up using the one in her shorts.

The college senior walked away from the adult sized playground that so many others were enjoying and back the way she came; the entrance to her dorm was there. Kelsey hadn't made it thirty feet before a pair of people wearing college colors approached her. They weren't much older than her- they could have been working on doctorates or masters degrees- but seemed infinitely more "adult" in their dress and demeanor. Come to think of it, all of the people that were supervising seemed to be around that age. They had all been wearing University t-shirts, too. "Wrong way, honey," a young woman with short blonde hair told Kelsey, pointing to the swing sets and slides that had been erected. "Playtime is that way. Over there."

"I need to get back to my dorm." Kelsey explained. This elicited a few giggles from the pair blocking her.

"Honey, you don't have a dorm," the male said, his hair thinning already. "Only college students get to have sleepovers here, not forever babies." There was that phrase again. First, Megan, now these two jokers. What was a forever baby? A gurgle in her gut told Kelsey that that question would have to wait. She didn't have time for this.

Quickly, the girl dug through the bib pocket in her shorts. Right where she left it, the tiny plastic rectangle with her picture was a welcome sight. "My combination keycard and student ID says otherwise." Without examining it, Kelsey handed her card over to the couple holding her up.

They examined it carefully, passing it to and from each other, as if they were TSA agents and Kelsey, in all her five foot nothing glory was a suspected terrorist about to board a plane. "Well...Kelsey...this is definitely a student ID of sorts." The lady said, her words slow and carefully chosen. "It's just not for this school."

"What?" Kelsey snatched her ID. "What are you talking...?" Kelsey stopped herself short. The guard was right. This was a school ID, just for the wrong school. Kelsey's sunny, brightly smiling face was still on the card, but the color scheme had changed to a light pink and baby blue mix instead of the college's bright and vibrant colors. Gone was the mascot in the lower right hand corner; in its place stood a teddy bear with a heart on its tummy. Her name and the

name of whatever school this was for was written in a strange font. She recognized the writing as English, but her eyes couldn't adjust to it enough to make out the words.

"Any other questions?" the male asked. "Do you need help, honey?" Yes, and yes on both counts, but Kelsey had the sinking feeling that these two wouldn't be willing or able to provide it.

"Nope, I'm good." Kelsey turned around and started walking towards the crowd of ridiculously dressed college kids.

"Just go play until your Mommy and Daddy come to pick you up," the woman called out after her. Kelsey didn't look back, instead raising her fist into the air to signal a thumbs up. Just then, a cramp rushed through her, causing her to stop dead in her tracks, almost doubling over. "You okay?" they called after her. The pain subsided, and Kelsey righted herself. Again, she signaled with a thumbs up. First thing first, find a toilet. Then try to suss out the rest of this bucket of crazy that had just been dumped into her lap.

The girl waddle-walked back into the crowd, talking to herself. "Gotta find a toilet. Gotta find a toilet," she kept repeating it as if it were some kind of mantra." Weren't there public toilets around here or something? Unfortunately, between the bouncy house, swing set, and various other upscaled playground equipment, as well as all of the babied-up college kids milling and crowding around, impatiently waiting for their turn, a clear line of sight was a logistical impossibility.

Distracting her, however briefly, was the blaring music from gigantic speakers that echoed over the entirety of the college courtyard-turned-playground. Intermingled with all of the ridiculously dressed early-twenty-somethings were what Kelsey thought of as University employees and older students working on their doctorates and MAs; they fit the stereotypical age range, anyways. They were all smiling, waving, and pointing the immature looking college students in the direction of this attraction or that. A few had cooler bags filled with juice boxes, which they handed out freely. Others, Kelsey saw, passed out little boxes of animal crackers. Still more lagged behind, picking up dropped garbage and putting them into black garbage bags. Great; everything needed to induce bathroom usage, but no visible bathrooms.

A dull ache from inside her hastened her search. Clutching her stomach slightly, Kelsey's direction sense, memory, and an inkling of common sense finally helped her orient herself. She'd been too busy trying to spot a bathroom past the push merry-go-round and the ball pit, but any kind of party would keep the good stuff far away from the toilets. At the same time, you always wanted people to know where to go to take a dump.

Standing on tip toes and craning her neck, Kelsey searched the periphery and saw what she thought she'd been looking for: A plain colored concrete building with a tented roof- a door with opposite ends facing the playground. Bingo! Around it a thin crowd of ridiculously dressed twenty-somethings lingered, as if waiting for a turn. Kelsey vaguely remembered passing by the

public restroom a number of times, the building being an unessential convenience and piece of background furniture in her years living in the dorms.

All similarities to a public restroom, at a big function or otherwise, ended there. In front of the building was a large banner on two tent poles. There were no words on the banner, but instead Kelsey recognized the near universal symbol for a baby changing station. A nondescript, sexless figure with splayed out arms and bowed out legs, with a solid white colored crotch indicating a diaper. It was the outline of an infant laying prone; but something was different; something was wrong. The outline's legs were too long, or the arms were too short; the proportions were still humanoid, but not to scale with an actual baby's.

On either side of the bathroom, instead of a line of porta-potties as might be expected for the big crowd, two large white tents had been set up on either side, with diapered people trickling in and out of them in little spurts.

None of the people dressed like...dressed like her were walking into the bathrooms or tents alone. All of them were escorted in and out as if they couldn't or wouldn't do it themselves. Kelsey watched as a young woman in her early twenties, wearing a bright yellow romper with bows in her hair, waddled out escorted by another woman who was thirty, tops. The older of the two wore a teal pair of scrubs, like a nurse or a doctor, gave the other girl a playful pat on her ass and the girl toddled out of the area and made a bee-line for a giant table that was being perpetually sprayed down with shaving cream.

The more adult woman waved goodbye (even though the other girl wasn't even looking back) and then strolled up to another group of adults dressed like toddlers. Kelsey watched, mouth agape, as a boy in a t-shirt and shorts- the most adult ensemble she'd seen someone her own age wearing, despite the obvious diaper peeking out- got his padded crotch groped. Guy didn't even flinch. No one did. No one seemed to mind it either when the lady walked around him and pulled back his underwear to have a look for herself. The slightly older (but infinitely more adult) woman nodded and took the boy by the hand, leading him into the tent. Kelsey didn't need to guess what was going to happen.

She watched for another minute, and witnessed Megan, her R.A. who had taken a dump right in front of Kelsey, was being dragged by her forearm towards the changing area. Her feet walked, however slowly, with the person in the university shirt towards the bathrooms and white tent; the other girl's eyes were searching outward, her free hand grasping towards the giant playground. She didn't look like someone being tortured or humiliated, Kelsey decided, but like a two-year-old who didn't want to stop playing to get her ass wiped. And from everything that Kelsey had seen today, that's effectively what was happening.

Mesmerized by the absurd horror show unfolding before her eyes, Kelsey looked on for several more minutes, ignoring the growing pain in her gut. Again and again, a kind of melodrama transformation was taking place. Some went in quietly like good little girls and boys, others were



overgrown little pills and fussed the whole way in, digging their heels in (for all the good it did them). One or two even had to be carried in. But no matter what, they all walked out smiling, giggling and happy, with their attendant giving them a little pat on the rear and sending them away to play again.

They were... "Adult babies." The words tasted of bitter ash in Kelsey's mouth, the inherent contradiction causing enough cognitive dissonance to make her feel the slightest bit dizzy. Maybe these people were getting more than just their butts wiped inside.

The college senior dismissed the idiotic thought as soon as she had formed it. There had to be a logical explanation for this, even if she hadn't found it yet. One thing was for certain: she did not want to go in there.

This wasn't working! Kelsey screamed at herself internally as her sense of urgency increased. Kink, convention, social experiment, or whatever this was, Kelsey could figure out all of that later. What she needed to figure out RIGHT NOW was how to not poop her pampers...her pants...how to not poop her pants. "Scuse me!" she called out to a passing boy with nothing covering his diaper "Can you tell me-?" He was gone into the crowd before she finished. "Hey?" she called out to a girl who didn't even have a shirt on. Again, she was ignored. "Excuse m-?" A gentle poke made the short senior turn around.

A blonde girl, only about three inches taller than Kelsey, looked her in the eye. "You okay?" she asked. Her expression, a frown of genuine concern and empathy, was offset by her outfit. Kelsey looked past the purple feetie pajamas, the dragon hoodie down, and saw the sincerity in the azure blue eyes.

"Not really," Kelsey grunted, feeling the moment of no return was fast approaching.

"You need help?" the other girl's face gaining its own urgency as Kelsey's registered. Kelsey nodded her affirmation. "Okay. What?"

Kelsey slammed her eyes shut as a cramp rolled over her. "Gotta... find... a bathroom," she gasped. "Now!"

There was a small pause as the blonde girl seemed to puzzle over Kelsey's predicament. Finally, she said "Okay! Follow me! I know where you can find a bathroom. My house is nearby. Let's go!" The blonde girl held out her hand and Kelsey took it without hesitation.

They broke off at a trot, the blonde girl leading the way through the sea of people like a veteran crowd sailor. The collective cacophony of screeches, giggles, and shouts mixed in with the occasional juvenile whining sob became so much white noise. It would be easy to get lost in

this crowd; to drown. All the while, Kelsey's new companion had an air of laser focus and casualness about her, as if she were completely in her element.

Her guide looked back over her shoulder. "Is this your first time at one of these things?" she asked. Biting her lip, Kelsey nodded. "Figured," the pajama clad blonde said, still dragging Kelsey through the crowd. "No biggie. Everybody has a first time."

It obviously wasn't her new friend's first time at one of these things, that much was for certain. While Kelsey had to keep correcting her pace and movement, her walking made no easier by the diaper between her legs or the jostling crowd she was weaving through, this strange Sherpa of sorts was walking and talking as if she'd been in padded underwear her entire life and was a veteran concert goer on top of that.

"My house is just up ahead," the other girl assured Kelsey. They had only moved about the length of a football field, if that, to the other end of the courtyard, but Kelsey didn't care if by "house" the other girl meant "dorm room." Kelsey didn't even care if "house" was code for "janitor's closet." Her mind was already fixated on her own personal endgame.

First, she'd run to a toilet, relieve herself of this burden, diaper included, and then figure out a way to straighten things out with the people who seemed to think she was some kind of mental invalid. Fuck it, if she could just find a little privacy she'd unbutton the crotch snaps on her newly altered shorts, rip the diaper off, take a dump on the floor, use the diaper to wipe her ass, and then be on her merry way, as long as she didn't soil herself.

Kelsey's legs came to a stop as her guide stopped jerking her around like a rag doll. The two of them had arrived. "We're hooooome!" the girl sang. The pride in her voice was of equal measure with the surge of disappointment in Kelsey's soul.

Off-white plastic walls greeted them. Windows, lacking glass, that were big enough to fall through stared out at them. A smooth, hard green plastic roof that was short enough that even Kelsey could have climbed atop with minimal assistance rose above them. An orange plastic door with grooves cut down into it to seem a crude facsimile of wood awaited them. It was a play house; the kind that you might see in the backyard of any middle class two-year-old. It was a large playhouse, granted, scaled up so that adults could enter it, but it was a playhouse all the same. As if to accentuate the discovery, Kelsey's eyes darted to the right, taking in a turtle shaped sandbox the width of a jumbo hot-tub; the inhabitants doing their level best to create and destroy little castles using special buckets and plastic shovels. No way that thing had indoor plumbing.

"Come on." the strange girl who'd led Kelsey this far said. "Let's go play house."

Kelsey's rage was about to boil over. She was an instant away from screaming at this crazy woman at the top of her lungs. This was some cruel joke, whether that had been the intent or

not. But when she opened her mouth to scream at the other girl, an uncontrolled sigh of relief came instead.

Kelsey Keaton had never spent much time on what it might be like to poop her pants. She had assumed that it would be explosive with everything that she'd been trying to hold in rocketing out her backside at once. Or maybe it would be a long, drawn out affair, with her solid waste clawing its way out of her, as she, red-faced, struggled to hold it all in until her body finally overrode her pride and with a final sobbing grunt, she was forced to push the mess into the back of her pants.

It wasn't like that all, though. The very instant she'd stopped focusing on the toilet-that-wasn't and started bemoaning her bad fortune, her insides relaxed and with a kind of long dormant muscle memory reactivated. The mess was already halfway out of her by the time she had opened her mouth, and when she had next inhaled, the entirety of it had exited its way into her diaper, ballooning it out ever so slightly before the mass it collapsed in on itself and spread along her cheeks. She had just shit herself. All it took was one brief pause, a little push- barely noticeable- and it all came flowing out. It was as easy as if she'd been doing it her whole life. She was a natural. She was a pro. Kelsey Keaton pooped her pampers like a pro.

While her body was certainly comfortable with this new development, Kelsey's mind was anything but. Her own scream was cut short by her throat tightening. A shiver of revulsion passed through her, as her stomach rolled, the signals from Kelsey's brain all but begging her to vomit. Her cheeks clenched in revulsion, which only spread the mess further.

"Hey, new kid," the girl in the purple dragon jammies looked back at her. "You comin'?"

The college senior stood there, knees locked in panic. She was shaking so hard that the buckles on her shorts were rattling a bit. "I...I...I..." Kelsey stuttered. "I..." she mouthed the word "pooped." Saying it out loud, even mouthing it made the squishy mess in what used to be her panties all the more real.

"Oh," the other girl said. "So...you comin'?"

Kelsey's knees locked in place. "I pooped..." Kelsey repeated the words. "I just went... in my pants."

"Uhhhh-huh." The blonde girl agreed, clearly not seeing the point of Kelsey's distress. "So?"

So? So?! How could Kelsey explain the level of personal shame she was feeling when everyone surrounding her seemed incapable of such a feat? It was like nailing a piece of Jell-O to a cat: No matter what, the damn thing wasn't going to stay still.

“Is that why you were over near the changin’ place?” Dragon Jammies asked. “Were you waiting for a grown up to take you there? I think you’re allowed to go yourself if you want, though I don’t know why anybody would...less they were leakin’ or somethin’.” Kelsey shook her head dumbly. “Yeah,” the blonde girl stuck out her tongue. “I don’t like stopping playtime either.” Then a light came on in the girl’s eyes. “Ooooooh! I think I know what happened.”

“You do?”

The other girl nodded confidently. “Yeah,” she said. “Let me guess: You just got changed, probably just a wet diaper or somethin’ but some grown-up thought you were too wet. How am I doin’ so far?” Kelsey stared blankly at the other girl, too blown away by the inaccuracy to correct her. “Aaaand,” the other girl prattled on, “you don’t wanna stop playing again just so some grown-up can be like, ‘But I just changed you!’?” She did this last part in a deep chesty bass with her arms crossed. “I hate it when that happens,” she finished in her regular voice. “It’s not your fault they changed you too early. Grown-ups...go figure.”

Kelsey couldn’t figure. She had no idea what the other girl was talking about. Not even three minutes prior, she could never even imagine soiling herself, and this stranger was acting like it was the most normal and mundane thing in the world. From her tone, this girl might as well have been talking about periods, or having a bad hair day, or some bad chick flick, or whatever normal girls talked about. Only instead of talking about normal things, she was talking about wanting to play house, and how inconvenient diaper changes could be.

All her life, Kelsey had had a hard time relating to people her own age and making significant friendships. She was always a little too juvenile in her appearance and tastes for most people to interact with beyond a surface level. Daisy Duck T-shirts and shortalls were not what you wore to go dancing, bar hopping, or crash a frat party. Classmates didn’t watch Sesame Street for fun.

Just now, though, she felt damn near grown up compared to the ones running around in sagging diapers and colorful onesies. Even with a load in her pants, she seemed like the biggest kid in the playground. She at least was mature enough to know that it was wrong and to be avoided. Now she was the one that didn’t want to talk about childish things like calling adults “grown-ups,” and had trouble relating to problems like interrupted playtime to go have her ass wiped for her. The pendulum had somehow swung in the other direction.

“Are you comin’?” Dragon Jammies called for Kelsey.

Kelsey found her voice, if only barely. “I gotta find a bathroom.”

“We can pretend shower in there,” the blonde girl pointed towards the playhouse.

Kelsey let out an exasperated sigh out through her mouth before breathing in through her nose. That was a mistake. The pungent smell of her own fertilizer was...was...okay, not that bad, (everyone likes their own brand), but the multi-stimulus reminder wasn't doing the college senior any favors. "I was trying to find a toilet," she explained.

The weirdo who'd dragged her to this waste of time cocked her head. "Toilet?"

Kelsey rolled her eyes. Of course. "Potty...?" she offered. Though come to think of it, a shower was more in order.

"Ooooooh!" the blonde girl bobbed her head in understanding. "Potty." The word sounded weird coming from the big toddler- unnatural- like she was saying a foreign word without being fluent in the language.

This was going nowhere fast. Kelsey sighed again. "I'm outta here." She turned around, her face cringing as the weight in her diaper moved with her, the mess just loose enough so that she could feel it whiplash behind her as she spun.

"Whoah!" Dragon Jammies ran around to block Kelsey; she was surprisingly fast. "I thought you wanted to play house."

Kelsey found her temperature rising again. Crazy girl just wouldn't let it go. Kelsey wondered: Is this what she did to people when she became fixated on the works of Dr. Seuss? "I'm going back to the public toilets."

"Why? You gonna go get changed?"

"No," Kelsey spoke very slowly and deliberately. "I'm going to have them to take me to the potty. Then she corrected herself. "I mean toilet."

"Why would they take you potty?" The slightly taller girl asked.

"I'm potty trained." Those were words that Kelsey hadn't had to utter since she was at least three years old.

The other girl just giggled. "No you're not. You pooped. They'll just change you." Kelsey opened her mouth to counter that argument and found that she couldn't. Everybody around her had gone insane. Everyone on campus was either acting like big babies or treating people like big babies. The men and women being escorted in and out of the bathrooms between the tents seemed no different than any of the others. Likely, all the available space was being used for the changing of adult sized diapers.

Also, Kelsey had already defiled herself. No way a bunch of crazies would believe she was an adult if she had her ass wrapped in a used diaper. They would change her diaper, give her a pat on her bum and send her on her way, just like everyone else. She was surrounded in a sea of strangers, too. Other than Megan, Kelsey hadn't seen a familiar face. The idea of a complete stranger stripping her naked, wiping the muck off her backside and then re-diapering her was disgusting and mortifying beyond belief; the ultimate in violation of personal boundaries for the young woman.

The psychology major had read cases of mass hallucinations and shared delusions, but never at this level, nor was this sort of thing so spontaneous. Maybe this was a fetish thing. She'd accidentally stumbled into an odd fetish party and everyone just assumed she was in on the joke, though that didn't explain how the diaper had gotten wrapped around her bum in the first place. Even if she was right and this was just a case of mass method acting, Kelsey didn't know the safe word, or whatever it was she would need to do to demonstrate that she no longer found the joke funny. Safe word, that was a thing, right? Right.

"Well crud," Kelsey whispered. Then she looked to the fellow inmate in the asylum. "Okay," she told Dragon Jammies. "Let's play house."

The blonde girl clapped her hands in a frenzy "Yaaaaaay!" she squealed before grabbing Kelsey by the wrist and made a mad dash towards the playhouse. "Mommy! I'm hooome!" the girl called out, her voice rattling off the hollow plastic walls.

"Mommy?" Kelsey echoed the greeting. Dragon Jammies needn't have bothered shouting. The house was only one room, and even if it was big for a toddler, it was still little more than a plastic shack. Kelsey could very well have raised the roof in the right places if she'd thought to put her hands up. As for "Mommy", if Kelsey was worried about some crazy older person thinking she was a two-year old, the opposite was true.

"Mommy," in this instance, was a dark-skinned girl with her hair pinned up in a little bun. Her Sophia the First t-shirt and light up sneakers almost complimented the sagging wet diaper practically hanging off her hips. Almost. "I'm not 'Mommy,'" she said to the girl in purple pajamas, "Grown-Ups don't call each other Mommy and Daddy. I'm 'Darling,' and you're 'Jim Dear.' Just like in that movie."

The two waddled over to each other, hugged, and made awkward 'Mwah' noises as they kissed the air. "Lady and the Tramp?" Kelsey asked, recalling the faceless humans from the film.

"That's how grown ups act," the girl in the wet diaper said as if she were a wise sage. "That's how my Mommy and Daddy act anyways." This new puzzle of a woman looked at Kelsey as if for the first time. "Oh my!" she said with a gasp that was too well enunciated to be sincere. "Where are my manners? I didn't realize that Jim Dear brought home a guest." The newest player in this bizarre melodrama, "Darling", looked to the girl in the dragon jammies and said, "I

thought you said you were going out and looking for a job. How are you supposed to provide for me? My mother said I never should have married you.”

Completely unfazed, Dragon Jammies, now ‘Jim Dear,’ thumbed over to Kelsey’s direction. “I found us a baby to play house with us,” she said. “I think she’d be really good at playing house.” Baby? Wasn’t the shitty pampers clinging to her backside babyish enough? And who were they to talk about being a baby? The girl who’d dragged her here crinkled just as much as she did, and the other one was one good wetting away from leaking. Anybody could see that.

Mommy/Darling jumped up and down, her wet diaper bobbing out sync with the rest of her. “A baby?! You got me a baby from the stork? Oh, Jim Dear!” She went and hugged the girl in the dragon jammies, and Kelsey shook her head in disbelief as the girls giggled and bounced in each other’s arms. The diapered Darling stopped. “Unless, this is a trick…”

“A trick?” The other two diapered women echoed the third.

“What if…” Darling paused. “What if you’re NOT Jim?”

“I’m not,” Dragon Jammies replied. “We’re just pretendin’. ‘Member?”

Ignoring her, Darling pressed on. “What if you’re really Jim’s evil twin?! You’re really his evil twin, trying to de-sleeve me, and that baby is yours and not his!” With a snap of her elbow, the new girl pointed dramatically at Kelsey. “Oh, but she is mine! And this is the secret that will tear apart both me and Jim’s marriage! I knew I never should have taken that nap with you! Mother always said, don’t sleep with strangers.

Stunned, Kelsey said, “You guys don’t mess around when you play house, do you?” She was so taken aback by the show unfolding in front of her that she almost forgot about the muck in her diaper. Almost.

“My Mommy watches soap.” Darling told Kelsey, breaking character. “The T.V. kind, not the bath kind. This is how grown-ups talk to each other when kids aren’t around.”

Kelsey snickered, despite herself. “Yeah,” she said. “I’m pretty sure it doesn’t work that way.”

“No,” Darling assured her. “It does. I’mma expert on grown-ups.”

Kelsey was about to counter that argument, when Dragon Jammies interrupted. “Buuuuut…if you’re gonna play the baby, you can’t talk like that, can you?”

“Oh yeah,” Darling said, her face a mask of thoughtful consideration. “Good point. Doesn’t that mean we have to start calling each other Mommy and Daddy now?”

"I think so," Dragon Jammies nodded.

"What should we do?" Darling asked.

"I'm notta..." Kelsey began to protest.

The girl in the purple footie pajamas interrupted her. "She wants to go potty."

"Potty training babies!" Darling shrieked with delight. "That's great! Suuuuper grown-up!"

Kelsey started to argue. "That's not what I—" The college senior wasn't able to finish the sentence before the two other women were dragging her to a nearby chair. "Hey! Leggo!"

"Baby's gotta go potty!" The other two said in unison. Kelsey found herself spun around and pushed backward. The backs of her knees touched a hard plastic chair and buckled, sending her careening straight down onto the hard seat. The fall likely wouldn't have hurt, regardless, but the extra cushioning made it a complete non-issue. It was the closest thing to sitting on a pillow. More traumatic than the fall, however, was the feeling of the mess in Kelsey's shortsalls spreading around, creeping and oozing up, down and out. What had been a fairly solid lump in the girl's diaper was now an uneven paste. Kelsey's lunch threatened to come up and greet the air.

Taking nauseated silence for compliance, the other diapered girls looked to each other. "What now?" Darling asked. "I've never potty trained anybody before."

"I think we make her sit until she pees or poops." Dragon Jammies said to her compatriot. Then with full seriousness, she looked Kelsey in the eye and asked. "Have you peed or pooped?" The world shimmered before her as Kelsey fought back tears of humiliation. Kelsey silently nodded, her vision a blur of water. The girl in the purple pajamas looked to the one in the wet diaper and instructed. "Now we gotta tell her what a good job she did and how she's almost a big girl."

"So big."

"Usin' the potty."

"I'm so proud of you!"

"Such a big kid."

Sitting in a paste of her own making, Kelsey's mouth went dry, her humiliation beginning to simmer into a boiling rage.



“Hey,” Darling looked to Dragon Jammies. “How do you know so much about potty training.”

“I paid attention when my Mommy and Daddy were potty training my little brother. He’s real smart. He drives a car now and everything.”

Enough was enough. “I’M POTTY TRAINED!” She shouted, pushing the two other overgrown toddlers out of her way as she stood.

Darling and Dragon Jammies stepped back. “Toldja I knew how to potty train a baby.”

“I’M! NOT! A! BABY!” Kelsey proclaimed, her voice loud enough to cause the playhouse walls to rattle. “I’M NOT A BABY! GOT IT?”

The other two girls looked at Kelsey like she was completely divorced from reality. “Well yeah,” Darling said, her sodden, swollen diaper swinging between her thighs like an old grandfather clock. “We’re just playin’ pretend, silly.”

“Then why,” Kelsey asked, exasperated, “is everybody our age wearing diapers?!”

“We’re forever babies,” the other two replied.

“But I’m twenty-two!”

“Yeah,” Darling agreed. “Forever babies.”

Dragon Jammies added, “My brother calls us Forbies.”

“What’s the difference?” Kelsey demanded.

The other two frowned a bit, more in careful consideration than in disappointment. Then they began to bombard Kelsey with information:

“Babies can get potty trained.”

“Babies can get outta daycare.”

“Babies get more mature.”

“Babies stop being babies.”

“Babies grow up.”

The college senior stood there, baffled. The absolute illogic of that statement combined with the confidence that it was stated with reeked of schizophrenia, or the early stages of dementia- any number of mental illnesses that she'd read about and studied... yet something about it rang true.

"Babies grow up," she echoed the statement. She felt like the wind had been knocked out of her. Sitting back down, now not even caring about her messy diaper, Kelsey repeated the words. "Babies grow up." She deserved this, she knew. Her entire life until today had been about indulging in the juvenile; never fully letting go; never fully growing up. Now, as far as everyone was concerned, she hadn't. Only it had gone too far. No one took her seriously, and she was expected to soil herself, surrender her agency to strangers, and be happy about it. This was some kind of divine punishment.

Dragon Jammies squatted down and made eye contact with Kelsey. "Don't tell me your Mommy and Daddy never gave you the talk, new kid." She might have been using her diaper, too, but Kelsey was beyond caring at this point.

Kelsey blinked away a tear. "The talk?"

"Yeah," Darling agreed. "The talk? About how everybody our age is too immature, so we're never gonna have to grow up. That's why we don't hafta go to school or use the potty." It should have sounded sad, but there wasn't even a hint of regret in the other woman's voice. If anything, she sounded cheery, or smug; the condescending tone of a rich kid looking down on the poor unfortunate souls that would have to work one day instead of just inheriting their daddy's money.

Dragon Jammies added in her own two cents. "Or hafta drink from big kid cups, or tie our shoes, or learn to drive. Nothin'!"

Darling chirped in, "How do they even drink like that without spilling juice everywhere?" Dragon Jammies shrugged.

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard," Kelsey fought against a sob.

Dragon Jammies shrugged nonchalantly. "It's how it is."

"But...but...but no!" Kelsey stood up, again. "That's NOT how it is. That's NEVER how it's been. I'm an adult. Yeah, I like cartoons and toys and kids' books, but I also was about to get a degree in psychology. I had it all planned out!" she explained, her breath starting to become ragged. "I was going to... graduate, then work part time at a social service agency while I worked on my Master's...."

Kelsey felt the sudden pangs of a filled bladder. The sensation was distracting her, but she had no intention of stopping talking. Fuck it. She was in a dirty diaper anyways. Half a thought later, she was letting loose a tiny stream into the thirsty padding between her legs.

“Then I was gonna teach college courses while I worked on my doctorate for another four to seven years,” Kelsey said as the diaper did its job; the padding starting to swell by the time she had finished speaking.

A silence filled the playhouse. The three diapered girls all stared at each other. Darling shook her head in total amazement. “You don’t mess around when you play school, do you?”

“I’M NOT PLAYING!” Kelsey screamed. “IT WAS PROBABLY THE ONE THING I WASN’T PLAYING AT! I’M NOT PLAYING SCHOOL! I’M NOT PLAYING HOUSE! I’M DONE PLAYING!”

All three stood there in silence, with the pounding of Kelsey’s heart drowning out the muted crinkle coming from her waist. Then, the last thing that Kelsey could have anticipated (though perhaps she should have) happened. Dragon Jammies and Darling, who had been perfectly happy stealing plots from soap operas while they played house, who had invited her to share in their playtime, who seemed as juvenile and as alien to her as she had likely seemed to others, started crying. It was ugly crying too: Full on wailing, snot bubbles forming, and no chance of a coherent word from either of them.

Kelsey dried her tears, held her hands up defensively and started to try to quietly shush the big babies...the “forever babies” or “forbies” or whatever they called themselves. She had lost her temper and yelled at them and now there were just more problems on top of problems. Her conscience flared up, telling her from inside her own confused mind that she had to make this right, somehow.

“Wait...” Kelsey told herself. “What am I even doing?” This wasn’t her problem. Getting two crazy chicks to act less crazy was not her responsibility. Escaping was! As fast as her legs would propel her, the psych major ran, slamming open the orange plastic door on her way out; her diaper crinkling and squishing with every step. The wails of the two girls chased her out into the open air.

The runaway girl looked behind her; the cacophony was so loud that the playhouse could be seen shaking from the outside. “Gotta-get-awa-oooof!” Her own thought was cut short as she ran right into another warm body. She stumbled backwards and tripped over her own legs; her puffy underwear breaking the fall. With the way her adrenaline was pumping, the humiliating state of her underwear didn’t even occur to her.

“STUPID BA-!” she shouted up. Only it wasn’t a baby, nor was it anyone dressed as a baby. The guy was built like a brick house with a gray flattop and matching goatee. He had the frame

of a professional weightlifter who'd only just lapsed into middle age. Like every other "grown-up" she had encountered, he wore a University T-shirt, this one a dignified polo with the logo on the breast.

A big meaty mitt offered Kelsey a hand up. Without thinking, the girl reached up and took it. "Easy there, little girl. You've got to watch where you're going or someone could get hurt." He smiled down at her in a kindly, almost grandfatherly way.

"Uh...thank you." Kelsey said quietly. Shit. This likely wouldn't end well. If the people guarding the entrance to the courtyard were any measure, this guy basically thought he was talking to a two-year-old.

"Now what sort of hurry are you in, little lady?"

Obviously, "my world has turned upside down in some sort of karmic irony kind of way and I'm trying to escape" was not an acceptable answer, so instead Kelsey said "Ball pit." As if in punctuation, a fresh wave of Dragon Jammies's and Darling's wails echoed out of the playhouse. The former full-fledged adult held her breath.

"What's going on in there?" the older guy asked Kelsey.

"Um..." Kelsey paused. "Maybe they're hurt? Better go check on them." Fingers crossed, if she got lucky, the giant next to her would leave her to check on the real "forever babies".

As things played out, Kelsey concluded that she should have crossed more fingers. Another playground attendant rushed into the plastic building and came out with two twenty-two-year-olds bawling their heads off. A big, suntanned hand took hers and the older man told her, "My friend has got this handled. Why don't we wait for them to come over and we can sort this out?" Kelsey's mouth became as dry as her diaper was wet.

A woman in her early thirties with bleached blonde hair brought a crying Dragon Jammies and Darling over to Kelsey "I checked them out real quick, Jude," the woman reported to the older man. "No cuts or bruises."

"Then why are they crying?" The older man, Jude, asked. He sounded like he was asking his co-worker, but he turned a suspicious eye on Kelsey. Kelsey shivered under his gaze, but kept silent. Still holding Kelsey's hand, he turned his attention to the two fussing women and in a slow, soothing baritone asked. "What's wrong, honey? Tell Ol' Jude why you're so sad so he can make it all better."

"NEW KID DOESN'T WANNA PLAY WITH US!" Dragon Jammies screamed.

Her diaper threatening to fall off her, Darling added, "AFTER WE POTTY TRAINED HER AND EVERYTHING!"

"Potty trained?" The bleached blonde attendant, whom Kelsey had internally dubbed "Judy", stifled a laugh. "Forbies can't be—"

The big man held up his hand to silence his co-worker. She took the hint. "Let me guess?" he said looking at the three babied girls. "House?"

"Uh-huh," Kelsey's accusers replied in unison. The big gray man's eyes came down on Kelsey and reluctantly, she nodded.

The college student's hand still engulfed in the giant's palm, Jude turned to her and said, "Aaaaand let me guess. You didn't want to be the baby? You probably get enough of that as it is. You wanted to be something different."

It was oversimplifying matters, greatly, but it was the closest thing to sense that Kelsey had heard. "Basically," she admitted.

The massive man stood up to his full height, towering above everyone else. "This is why we shouldn't set up that play house for these kinds of events," he said to his co-worker. "Too many kids, and not enough supervision to handle good conflict resolution and teach proper social skills." Kelsey instantly liked the guy. "Forever babies can't handle that much unsupervised social interactions. They're too immature." And just like that, Kelsey couldn't stand him.

"Preaching to the choir, Jude," the woman with the bleached blonde hair agreed. "Not to mention there's a lot of blind spots in that playhouse. Something bad could happen in there besides some hurt feelings, and we might not know until it's too late."

"Amen to that." Jude nodded. "Now," he looked at the three diapered girls. "How about we all say sorry and get back to playing nice?"

The three college aged toddlers all looked at each other. From the sober and somber looks in their eyes, Dragon Jammies and Darling had reached the same conclusion that Kelsey had: apologize or they were going to be stuck here.

"Sorry," Kelsey mumbled.

"Sorry," the other two replied.

No eye contact was made by any party.

“Alright,” the big man said, a soft, satisfied smile crossing his lips. He looked directly at Dragon Jammies and told her, “Go play.” With all of the surprising speed and agility that she had demonstrated before (despite being diapered) the blonde girl took off and melted into the crowd milling around the push merry-go-round. Kelsey likewise made to move, only to find that her arm was still being firmly gripped “Not. So Fast.” Each word was a death sentence being handed down from on high.

The short girl looked up at the man towering over her. “But I said I was sorry,” she pleaded.

A derisive snort came from the big man holding her. “You’re not in trouble, baby girl. I just need to check something.” Kelsey didn’t even have time to ask when she was hoisted over the grandfatherly man’s gargantuan shoulder. She pushed up on his back, trying to orient herself, when she spied “Darling” being led away by the female attendant. Based on the other girl’s sulking body language, soaking diaper, and the direction that she was being led, there was little doubt in Kelsey’s mind that she was heading for the changing area.

Meanwhile, she herself was being groped. The old man’s giant hands patted and squished her padded rear, reminding her that she was in an even worse position than the house player. “Yup,” she heard the big guy pronounce, “thought so.”

“Let me go!” Kelsey shouted. “Put me down!”

“Sure thing, pumpkin, soon as we get you cleaned up.”

Cleaned up! A diaper change! This middle-aged giant was touching her in her most private of areas with no concern for her modesty or feelings. Kelsey hadn’t even gotten around to going on a proper date yet and now a stranger was groping her and preparing to do worse after knowing her for less than five minutes. This was hell, or at least purgatory.

That was it. She’d had an aneurysm at the wishing fountain while trying to remember that ridiculous set of tongue twisters and was now in some bizarre kind of purgatory. Well Kelsey Keaton wasn’t about to go down that easy; not her.

“NO!” she screamed, beating on the old lug’s back, both hands clenched into fists. “Let go! Let go!” She began punctuating every word by beating on her captor’s spine. “I!” THUNK. “DON’T!” THUNK. “WANNA” THUNK. “GET!” THUNK. “CHANGED!”

All she got for a reply was a tighter grip on her legs and back, and felt the vibrations of the man’s laughter as he chuckled to himself. “Forbies.”

It had been Kelsey’s goal to get away from the oversized toddler playhouse, and she got her wish. The big man whipped around, and she could see it shrinking in the distance as he carried her to the part of this whole playground carnival setup that she’d most hoped to avoid.

He took big, quick steps as she pounded powerlessly on him, and soon Darling in her sagging underwear was lagging behind, too.

Kelsey continued to beat against the old mammoth, refusing to give up. “LET!” THUNK “ME!” THUNK. “GO!” THUNK.

“Just be a good girl, and you can get back to playing,” her captor spoke in a steady, unbothered rhythm, “I promise.” The sun stopped shining for Kelsey as she was carried into the tent; the smells of sweat, human waste and baby powder flooded her nostrils. Her world went topsy-turvy for a moment as she was slung off her captor’s shoulder onto a table.

She let out a gasp as her back hit the padded surface and a strap was pulled across her chest. She twisted her head this way and that, so that she could gather her bearings. For ten feet in every direction there were padded tables, manned by men and women in scrubs. If not for the context, Kelsey might think they were med students or nurses or something. Heck, they still might be.

The tables themselves were thick and sturdy, with shelves underneath, each one stocked with pastel and white rectangles in different thicknesses and sizes. On top of them was a little nook with baby wipes and powder, and a little mobile dangling tiny plush dolls over the head rest. Beside them were shiny silver garbage cans with lids that popped up when you stepped on a pedal.

If that wasn’t enough, more telling were the people who were laying on top of them. As Kelsey wriggled and struggled with the restraints, she saw Darling waddle up and get helped up onto a table. She saw Darling begin sucking her thumb and batting at the mobile above her head, while the attendant secured her to the table, cooing baby talk all the while.

Changing table! She was on a changing table! Frantically, the college senior tried to unbuckle the strap across her chest, her fingers trying to work at the latch just below her breasts, but nothing was working. She could feel the simple release button on the buckle, just like a seatbelt, but for some reason, her fingers couldn’t push it hard enough. Was there another release somewhere that had to be pushed simultaneously, or had her fingers just become incredibly weak? “We’ve got a squirmer”, the man who’d restrained her called out. “Order up.”

A red-haired lady in pink scrubs walked up to the other side of the adult changing table. “Oh, thanks for finding another one, Jude.” She said. “You’re a real saint.”

“Don’t I know it?” Jude chuckled, walking off.

The lady pulled a pair of vinyl gloves from a box. “Okay, okay. Calm down, sugar. This isn’t gonna be a big deal. I’m just gonna change your diaper.”

“There’s been a mistake!” Kelsey panted, trying one last attempt at reason. “I’m not really a baby!”

The nurse, as Kelsey thought of her, smiled condescendingly down at her. “Of course not, honey. You’re a Forever baby.” One by one in rapid succession, the snaps holding Kelsey’s shorts were undone. The privacy and protection that her clothes offered her was just an illusion, the popping of little brass buttons signaling the end of the pretense.

Kelsey did not think to kick the woman in the face as the thick, cartoon decorated diaper, once white but now horribly discolored by her excrement came into view when the denim was peeled back. “Why do people keep saying that?!” Kelsey asked, ignoring yet another gross and casual violation of herself.

“You wouldn’t understand,” the red-haired lady said, smiling sweetly. “You’re a little too immature.” She leaned over and stared at the teddy bear decorated waistline of Kelsey’s diaper, and traced some strange logo near the side of the landing strip. “Let’s see,” she spoke more to herself. “Size 12, looks like.”

“I’m plenty mature,” Kelsey spoke up, protesting as the nurse bent over and began filing through drawers just beneath her peripheral vision.

The other woman stood up, holding an identical (though clean) diaper to the one Kelsey was wearing. “Is your diaper wet?” the nurse asked innocently enough.

“Yeah...” Kelsey admitted.

“Do big girls pee-pee in their pants?”

Kelsey’s face flushed. “No..but..”

“Did you know you were wet?”

“Yeah..but you see-“

Kelsey was interrupted. “Then why didn’t you come get it changed?”

Kelsey clenched her teeth and as calmly as she could, began, “I was in the middle of explaining to these two other girls about my college degr-“

“So you were too busy talking with your little friends to come get changed?”

“I mean, when you put it that way...” Kelsey admitted, not liking where this was going.



The red-haired woman all but waved the fresh diaper in front of the younger girl's face. "That doesn't sound very mature, does it?"

"I-"

"If you were really a big girl," she cut Kelsey off, "and had had a pee-pee accident, wouldn't you have come and found a grown-up to help sort things out?"

"I mean," Kelsey tried to explain, not thinking before she spoke. "I had already pooped." The two women locked eyes in dawning recognition of the opportunity Kelsey had just provided her verbal sparring partner. Too late, Kelsey realized she should have just kept her mouth shut.

"Oh, you pooped too?" the nurse smirked.

"Yeah..."

"Do big girls poop their pants?" As if to accentuate her point, the nurse lifted Kelsey's legs by the back of her knees, sliding the back half of her shortalls away and giving the discolored brown backside of Kelsey's diaper a firm pat.

"No..." Kelsey yipped at the sensation, a grimace coming across her face.

The red-haired woman pressed on as she grabbed a packet of baby wipes. "Did you know you had a messy diaper on?"

"Uh-huh..."

The nurse took the time to redirect her gaze straight into the (former it seemed) college senior's face. "Why didn't you come get cleaned up? Even big girls have accidents sometimes."

"I was trying to get answers from these two kids who were playing house and weren't making any sense." Kelsey pleaded her case.

"And you didn't want to come all the way back here to get cleaned up?"

"Yeah!" Kelsey gulped in realization. Why did she keep on talking?

"So you were too busy playing house to be bothered. Is that mature?"

"No..."

“It’s okay, sweetie, you can’t help it.” The woman’s gloved hands spider tickled their way up the poor girl’s legs. Kelsey didn’t giggle, though. “You’re a Forever baby. Let’s get you changed and then you can get back to playing until your Mommy or Daddy comes to pick you up.”

“Uh-huh…” Kelsey sighed. “Fuck me,” she whispered.

### CHAPTER 3

*At its core, magic has always been about instant and immediate gratification. Pumpkins turn into carriages right before a poor girl. Beanstalks sprout into the sky overnight after a little boy has been swindled out of the family cow. A little wooden child springs to life, instantly knowing how to walk and talk and be alive despite being minutes old. The biggest appeal of magic is that there's not supposed to be a waiting period.*

*All of this is because magic is about the power to get what you want and to get it right now! "Works like magic" means "very fast". "Rome wasn't built in a day," means "you must be patient." Rarely are the two phrases ever used to describe the same process.*

*If Sigmund Freud were enlightened enough to know the truth of magic, he would say that it comes from the id, the most selfish and impulse part of the human psyche. The id does not do well with delayed gratification. The id does not do well with the muted feelings that come with reason, for reason is almost the antithesis of magic itself.*

*Magic is literally wanting something bad enough that you let yourself have it.*

*But with this element comes dangers. Like King Midas and his golden touch, or the farmer who wasted his three wishes on a sausage, magic is not empowered by long term thinking; people capable of such introspection and planning usually do not need magic, or they find themselves unable to use it by tapping into that impulsive, selfish part of the human condition.*

*And so history is filled with stories about magic and long term consequences backfiring on the wielder.*

*Why not stop the magic, then? Why shouldn't the sorcerer's apprentice be able to snap his fingers and stop the brooms from flooding everything with an endless march of buckets and water?*

*Magic is thought made manifest. Can you really stop yourself from thinking and still be alive? Once your reality has been altered and your most potent will has taken shape, once your id has been made manifest, can you really stop what is essentially a part of you?*

*The answer is usually "no." Magic can rarely be halted even by the person who uses it. Whether you like it or not, magic will make sure you get what you always wanted.*

- *An excerpt from "Do You Believe in Magic?" by Cornelius Crowley.*

## 1.

### Susan

Susan lay there on the public bench, unable to do much more than crane her neck up in horror as her mother went for the tapes on her diaper. It was as if her spine had a steel rod inserted in it and there was an electromagnet beneath the bench. Her stomach clenched and she tried to sit up, but nothing more than a few impotent spasms came of it.

Her arms were equally useless, retracting up to her chest and locking in place as if she were doing a bad impression of a Tyrannosaurus Rex; no matter how she willed it otherwise. Her legs were equally weighted and refused to kick.

The sound of the tapes ripping off the front of her diaper rang out, ripping away at the accounting major's pride and sense of modesty. Mom pulled the diaper open, causing her to flash Vanessa, Vanessa's mother, and any passerby who cared to cast a glance at her smooth and hairless pubic area and private parts.

Any and all reservations that she was experiencing something more than just an elaborate and inappropriate punishment from her mother evaporated from her mind as soon as the wind hit her smooth and glistening mound. Even when Susan did her own "landscaping", so to speak, she was never THAT good. Nothing short of laser hair removal was that good.

Yet here she was: as naked and as smooth as if puberty had never been a thing. No way could her mother have done this, not without her knowing. This...this was magic.

Janet looked down at her daughter's wet and glistening mound carefully, inspecting what Susan had done in her disposable panties. Then her eyes went down to the inside of the diaper itself. She was an insurance adjuster eyeing a wreck, assessing the severity of the damage. "Just a little wet," she sighed. "You really could have waited until we got back to the diner, but we might as well finish what we've started." Susan moaned internally. What "we've" started? Yeah right. Susan hadn't started any of this madness.

Susan's mother moved her gaze away from her pubic area and took a look at her upper body. She saw Susan in her state of panicked paralysis and her expression softened a bit. "Oh you poor thing, I almost forgot." Janet reached down into a side pocket of the diaper bag and pulled something out.

"Flopsy?" Susan gave a dry squeak of surprise, looking up at the little stuffed rabbit toy her mother now held. She hadn't seen Flopsy in years, and hadn't actively thought about one of her earliest childhood toys in even longer. The rabbit was pink, with one ear, longer than the other, flopping down over the toy's left button eye. Just like her, Flopsy was dressed in a frilly, unbelievably girly dress. Unlike Susan, Flopsy had always been this way.

What was even stranger was that Flopsy wasn't good as new or as pristine as the old pictures from preschool. The bunny doll was clean enough, but the fabric of her fur had a worn, well used, not quite threadbare look about it. The old girl had seen better days, but had still been well cared for. It was as if little Susie had never grown up into Susan and discarded her childish, girly things like so much garbage.

"That's right, Susie," Janet cooed. "I didn't forget Flopsy." She leaned over and placed the doll in Susan's arms. "Go on, honey, give her a hug." The doll in her arms, Susan's limbs relaxed and went numb. Whether she could move her arms or just wouldn't, Susan didn't know. She didn't test to see if the long-forgotten doll had somehow given her control of her arms, instead cuddling the thing close to her chest and letting the building ache in her arms vanish and taking what comfort she could from it.

"Good thing you don't have a boy," Vanessa's mother chuckled. "You'd be in the danger zone right now if you did." Susan's mother looked over to the still open diaper under her adult daughter's bum.

"Yeah," she agreed. "That, and I wouldn't get to dress a boy up in as many cute outfits." Susan felt her legs lift up with just the slightest prodding from her mother; and flinched and grimaced as each cold, wet, baby wipe was dragged and dabbed between her legs and down her bottom.

Vanessa's mom hummed in agreement. "Girl clothes are much cuter." Vanessa, for her part, stood by her mother and played with her plastic keys as Janet yanked the used diaper out from her daughter's bottom and balled it up with one hand, wipes and all, as easily as if she'd done it for decades. "Though according to all the Mommy blogs," Vanessa's mom prattled on, "boys clothes are sturdier, better for rough and tumble play and hold up under dirt better."

Mom tossed the balled-up wad of plastic into a nearby garbage can. (One shot. Swish.) Then, still keeping Susan's legs in the air, Mom grabbed a fresh diaper, flapped it open and slid it under Susan's upended bottom. "My little Susie can be a fuss," she spoke to the other adult, "but she's normally a good little girl who loves her pretty clothes and doesn't like to get them dirty. The only thing I need to be sturdy and take a beating are her diapers."

Vanessa's mom giggled and gave a "fair enough" as Mom pulled the fresh diaper up Susan's legs and reached for the sides. Susan made a face as the diaper took form around her, tightening with each tape. One side, then the other.

Flopsy still in her arms, Susan stayed perfectly still as her mother pulled down the hem of her dress and then, as if Susan were a doll herself, was picked up and deposited back in the stroller.

The adults started talking to each other, but a pounding, throbbing sensation in Susan's head was drowning much of what they were saying out. How awful had that been? She had been

stripped and cleaned in front of three people who had no business seeing her naked, and the whole event had been complete with commentary on how she might pee on them or how pretty her clothes were.

Susan blinked and peered at Flopsy through her glasses. She took little comfort in having the old doll back, but it was at least a little.

A lethargy gripped a hold of her, and suddenly sitting in the padded chair, and wearing this padded underwear didn't seem so uncomfortable. It was cozy even. Might as well sleep. People were seeing her in diapers and baby clothes and shrugging it off anyways. At least if she were unconscious she wouldn't need to hear it.

The former future accountant made eye contact with the other big baby on the sidewalk. There was a look of pure, blissful, innocent content on the other "Forby's" face. How Susan envied her in that moment. To be that helpless, yet secure in yourself and your surroundings? It was almost zen. "Night-night, Susan." Vanessa waved as Susan's eyelids began to droop, shutting out the afternoon sunlight.

## 2.

### Dakota

Dakota and her new friend/patsy stood in a bathroom at Brendan's house. Through processes she couldn't quite explain, but instinctively knew she was powerless to stop, (for the moment anyways), a failed marriage proposal had magically transformed into a big baby birthday party. Even worse, Dakota was the girl who was under dressed.

But all of that was about to change. The bathroom wasn't particularly big: A blue bathtub tub along one wall, a potty (toilet, it's a toilet) across from the tub, a doorway between them, and just enough walkway over to the countertop and sink next to the toilet so that two people could shuffle in single file.

Guest bathroom. Definitely a guest bathroom. If Brendan's parents had just been a little bit richer, it would have been "the help's bathroom." Granted, if Brendan's parents had been just a little bit richer, Dakota might have said yes, and who knows, maybe she wouldn't look like a hybrid of Angelica and Tommy Pickles.

Still, this place had its uses and its charm. For instance, the countertop and mirror were juuuust high enough that Dakota could look at herself without seeing the top of her wet diaper. Dakota saw her beautiful blond hair done up in pigtails and wanted to gag. With a sniff and an upper lip curled in disgust, she yanked the ribbons out of her hair, letting it fall back down to her shoulders where it belonged. "Better," she said to her reflection. "Not great, but better."

"I liked your hair like that," Alice said. Alice, with her hair in long dark braids, and a light blue dress straight out of a certain Disney Animated classic, wasn't who Dakota would normally call upon for fashion advice. "Why'd you take your ribbons out? Did you get bugs in 'em or somethin'?"

As near as Dakota could tell, everyone close to her age had started acting just as dumb as they'd dressed. Somehow, despite a little accident in what used to be her silk panties, Dakota had retained her wits about her while everyone else, including Alice, had gone the way of Sesame Street. Dakota looked at the lesser girl, analyzing her. "Yeah," she said, "I'm not getting a date with my hair like that unless I start cosplaying as Harley Quinn, and geeks are not worth it."

"What?"

The blonde sighed. "Never mind. You wouldn't understand. Maybe you used to, but you wouldn't now." Jesus Christ, look at what Dakota had been reduced to working with. At least Alice had somehow snagged some actual makeup to use. Maybe Alice had been a bit of a bad girl before the world went crazy. Maybe Dakota might have actually liked Alice had they met and talked before the party had started.

Probably not. But maybe.

Dakota eyed her new sidekick impatiently. "Are you gonna break out the makeup, or what?"

Her "friend's" eyes unglazed themselves just long enough for Alice to blink and say "Oh yeah, that!" The girl dug into the pockets of her dress and took out the lipstick and mascara she had smuggled away from her parents. (At least that's what her addled brain remembered. It was probably just something leftover from after everyone's clothes went all toddler.) "We're gonna be sooooo pretty!" she said, putting the tubes of makeup down on the counter.

The ex-gold digger rolled her eyes and smiled condescendingly. "Sure, we are. Sure." She snatched up the lipstick and looked at it with a strange mix of envy and hunger. It was her golden ticket. It was her magic wand, (the actual magic one...not the vibrator). It was, she knew deep in her heart, the key to being seen as an adult now that the world had suddenly gone mad.

"Can I help?" Alice spoke up, breaking Dakota's concentration.

"Pffff," Dakota scoffed. "Yeah," she smirked, "no."

The other girl pouted out her lip and stamped her feet a bit. "But I'm really good at makeup!" she whined.

"I doubt you're even good at coloring." Dakota was a cat, staring at contempt at the pouting puppy though half closed lids.

"But...but..." Alice pressed, "my mommy is a whatchamacallit...? A make-upper!"

"You mean a beautician?" Dakota couldn't help but curl her upper lip in disgust at this obviously reduced excuse for a human being.

"Yeah! That's it! A boo-tishan!"

Dakota looked her patsy in the eye. "Are you a beautician?" Her finger was a scalpel poking the other girl right in the chest.

Alice looked down at her black patent leather shoes and answered. "No..."

"Thought not." Dakota said with some finality. Turning her attention to her reflection, she licked her lips with anticipation as she twisted the tube and watched the little red head come out of its hole.



Alice looked up. "But that's only cuz forever babies don't grow up," she said defensively. "I'd be a really, really good make-upper...I mean boo-tishan... if I was gonna get growed up. My mommy says so." Dakota put down the lipstick and glared at the other girl.

"The hell are you talking about?" she asked. "Everybody grows up."

"We don't," Alice replied. "We stay little, no matter how big we get."

"That doesn't make any sense! Age doesn't work that way!" Dakota grabbed her own breasts in both hands, jiggling them a bit for emphasis. "Do these look like something a little girl would have?!"

Alice giggled. "Hee-hee..jiggly..."

"Alice! Focus!"

Alice blinked. Then she said, "It doesn't matter if you got your big girl boobies. You're still not a grown-up."

"Then what am I?" an exasperated Dakota asked.

"A forever baby."

"I'm twenty-two!"

"Still a baby," Alice shrugged, a silly grin plastered on her face.

This was going nowhere. Dakota took a deep breath...and then promptly lost it. "You're an adult! I'm an adult! Everybody here at this goddamn overgrown kiddie party is an adult!"

Alice stuck her tongue out. "Nuh-uh. We're babies! That's why we're wearin' diapers."

"That doesn't make you a baby," Dakota shrieked, "that makes you friggin' incontinent." Then she added, "And gross!"

The other girl's eyes darted to the wet padding sagging between Dakota's legs. They didn't stay there long, though, instead moving to the lipstick and mascara on the bathroom counter, and then back to the diaper. "Doesn't that mean that you're not a big girl just cuz you put makeup on?"

A hot flush rushed to Dakota's cheeks. "...I..." she began. "SHUT UP!"

"Cuz I'd rather be a twenty-two year old baby than a gross in-condiment." Alice plodded on.

The mascara wand and lipstick tube were in Dakota's hands and being brandished like a set of daggers. "Listen you little twit," Dakota hissed. "You want these shoved up your nose?" Alice's mouth snapped shut so quickly that her teeth clicked. She quickly pinched her nose and shook her head. "Then shut up and let me do this," Dakota threatened.

Tears glistening in her eyes, Alice backed up a step, but otherwise stayed silent and still. Her dominance reasserted, Dakota snorted loud enough to cover up the slight crinkle she heard as she pivoted back to the mirror. Then with years of practiced technique, she began to make herself look like a woman.

A line along the bottom lip, a slight purse of the lips, and a few strokes along her eyelashes. It wasn't much, all told, but it still made Dakota feel like the hot, powerful sex-kitten that she knew she was. She wasn't some dumb baby who'd just pissed her diaper; she was Dakota Stevens, man-eater.

"Beautiful," she whispered, completely taken with herself. Satisfied, a feeling of contentment washed over her as she put the makeup back down on the counter. Now if only she could do something about her hair. It was already starting to get frayed and knotted in spots, as if she had never conditioned it in her life. With careful hands, she began to untangle the mess that had been made of her hair thanks to the impromptu (and unasked for) pigtails.

Like Narcissus before her, Dakota was so taken aback with her reflection to notice the shadow darkening the bathroom doorway, or to realize that she hadn't even thought to close the door. "DAKOTA!" a voice boomed in the bathroom. "WHAT ON EARTH DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!" Dakota looked towards the source of the voice. Hands on her hips, and foot tapping impatiently, Brendan's mother glared at Dakota as if she were a naughty little girl playing with makeup.

Dakota looked at her (now ex) boyfriend's mother, staring her down as if she were the lowest lifeform on earth. She looked to Alice for some kind of commiseration or hint as of what to do. Alice, though, was sitting on the bathroom floor, sucking her thumb and grinning up at Dakota. With her back to Mrs. Jay, Alice's gleeful expression of pure schadenfreude remained hidden from the true adult.

The ex-gold digger's eyes looked back to Brendan's mother, and then to Alice again, and then something in her own reflection caught her eye. Daring to fully break eye contact, she looked at her face in the mirror.

Mascara was smeared in big black blotches over her eyes as if she'd be crying for hours and her tears had traveled upward onto her forehead. Lipstick formed a bizarre grin that Heath Ledger would have said was too much, giving her cheeks a hue reminiscent of a sunburnt rose. She was a clown whore.

How had that happened? Dakota had just applied the cosmetics purposefully and with great care and accuracy. But in the span of a blink, with just the slightest loss in concentration, it now looked like an imbecile had done the deed. The mirror showed it to be true.

Mirrors didn't lie. For all her bluster, Dakota felt like how she now looked: An overgrown baby in a t-shirt and wet diaper, her playful pigtails undone, her hair a mess and a grown-up's make up smeared carelessly over her face in a childish and uncoordinated pantomime of something a real woman might do.

The mirror might not have been broken, but a tiny part of Dakota's psyche felt a crack in it.

Out of options, the little blonde hussy did the only thing that seemed natural. "SHE DID IT!" she pointed at Alice, now sitting on the bathroom tile. Alice's face twisted from a gleeful sneer into something with big puppy dog eyes, and pouty lips. Like a master thespian, Dakota's so-called inferior turned around, and her chest started heaving as she yanked her thumb out of her mouth and began to mewl pathetically like a half-drowned kitten.

"Nuh-uh," she whimpered. "Dakota said she had somethin' she wanted to show me. And...and... I know I'm not supposed ta be in the bathroom without a grown-up.. but she made me. She said she'd stick her pretty makeup stick and shove it up my nose if I didn't stay quiet!"

Incensed beyond reason, Dakota's blood boiled red hot and she found herself shouting down at her accuser "THAT'S YOUR MAKEUP YOU LYING LITTLE SKA-!"

"DAKOTA!" Mrs. Jay cut her off. Dakota froze, her knees locking and her diaper warming bit as a spurt of urine involuntarily seeped out of her.

"Y-y-yes ma'am?" She asked, suddenly very afraid. Mrs. Jay had gone from being a middle-aged lady to schmooze and make fake smiles at for the duration of her courtship with Brendan, to an elder goddess whose mere tone was suddenly a lash to Dakota's brain stem.

Brendan's mom walked in past Alice and silently shooed the treacherous little brat out the door while never taking her eyes off of Dakota. Alice scampered away like the little weasel she was, as Mrs. Jay stared down Dakota with a quiet fury burning behind her eyes.

The difference wasn't more than an inch or two, just like it had been earlier that day, but Dakota felt so unbelievably small standing up next to the older woman. The difference wasn't just a matter of height, it was a matter of substance. In that quiet moment, with only the slight buzzing of the lightbulbs, Dakota saw what could have been her mother-in-law in a completely new non-fluorescent light.

Mrs. Jay had been like Dakota once; playing the social game, playing the field, looking to catch the right boyfriend and turn him into the right husband. Fighting and warding off other social harpies with aplomb and style, throwing shade and undermining the confidence and self-esteem of anyone who even hinted at hindering her or her goals. She had ended up with Mr. Jay, and whether that was a matter of lack of options, or just plain, stupid love was irrelevant. Like recognized like, and in that moment, Dakota saw a veteran bareknuckle prizefighter towering over a rookie with only a relative handful of fights a lucky lefty hook.

“Is that true?” Mrs. Jay asked, “ Did you threaten to stick that makeup up Alice’s nose?” Right out of the gate the old gal was coming swinging

“Yes...but..” Dakota tried to defend herself.

“And did you get in a fight with Brendan?” That question almost knocked the wind out of the younger woman.

“Yes but...”

“So he invites you to his birthday party, and you decide to be a bad guest...letting other girls get involved in your mischief?”

“I didn’t decide anything!” Dakota almost spat back. “It just happened, okay?! And Alice took that makeup, not me!”

“You think I don’t know that?” Mrs. Jay retorted derisively. Dakota took a step back. “Honestly, little girl, you don’t have any pockets and Alice has always been a little sneak thief. But did you tell a grown up?”

Dakota just shook her head, not able to find words.

“No,” Mrs. Jay went in for the kill, “you thought it’d be more fun to play grown-up than actually behave like one, and so I caught you here smearing gunk all over your face. Honestly, Dakota, I’m disappointed in you. Brendan has always thought of you as a kind of little sister, and today of all days you decide to be naughty. I’d never expect this kind of behavior from you.”

“You’re not gonna spank me, are you?” Dakota gulped, suddenly feeling that a backside beating was immediately in her future. She’d never been spanked before in her life, no matter how much she’d needed it, and this sudden re-treading of childhood seemed like a likely time to revisit the prospect of getting her hide tanned as a reasonable and likely outcome of getting caught.

Mrs. Jay blew a puff of air out of her nose and just stared for a moment, obviously considering the act of taking Dakota over her knee. “Don’t be ridiculous, honey, I don’t hit children.”

“Oh,” a wave of relief passed over Dakota. Her shoulders slumped and her posture loosened a bit. At least that wasn’t happening; the young woman couldn’t think of something much more humiliating than that; and in a diaper no less.

Before Dakota could so much as sigh in relief, however, the older woman’s hand grabbed Dakota’s wrist. “Don’t think you’re getting off easy, though, little girl.” Mrs. Jay turned her back on Dakota and began dragging her out of the bathroom.

Barefoot heels skidded along the tile floor, and then carpet as Dakota was dragged back into the living room where a game of Pin The Tail on The Donkey was well underway. The chorus of giggles was instantaneous, and not just from the giant toddlers.

Adults who still acted the part chuckled behind their hands. Old aunties and grannies tittered knowingly, no doubt reminiscing. Her peers cackled and guffawed; snickered and sniggered as they pointed towards the source of their ridicule.

If Dakota’s face hadn’t already been magically smeared with lipstick, the deep red blush of embarrassment would have been even more evident.

Brendan, his tears long since dried in the interim, took off his blindfold and then turned red with laughter at the sight of her, giggling so hard that he fell down on his padded bottom. He grabbed his belly, rolling on the floor like a turtle on his back. His laughter stopped for a moment as he looked down past his weight and felt at his crotch, but only for a moment.

The only people who weren’t laughing were Dakota and her jailer. From beside the fancy stone fireplace, Mrs. Jay dragged out a tiny hard wooden step stool and with an air of authority, moved it against a nearby wall.

“Time out, young lady” Brendan’s mother spoke, pointing her finger at the shin high slab of wood. All of the people Dakota’s age, the “forever babies”, if Alice had spoken truly went silent as if a death sentence had just been handed down. If Dakota’s mind had any thoughts of lingering or resisting, the message didn’t get to her body. Her knees buckled, and the padded squish caused her to wince as she sat down, the tiny little time-out seat causing her knees to cradle up to just below her breasts.

But Mrs. Jay wasn’t done by a longshot. The older woman walked with purpose to the other side of the room and flipped open the lid on a heavy oak chest. Most of the other kids likely couldn’t read the rainbow colored block lettering on the front, but Dakota could still decipher the words.

“DRESS UP”

Brendan's mother stopped digging and from the chest withdrew a giant, frilly, white and blue striped baby bonnet. Walking back to where Dakota was perched, clutching the bonnet like a bride's bouquet she said, "Dakota decided that she was too big to be a forever baby. She thought she could be a big girl and made a mess of herself instead." The ex-gold digger didn't dare move as Mrs. Jay lowered the overly cutesy headwear onto her head, her chin quivering while the string was quickly tied beneath it. "Maybe this," Mrs. Jay said, "will help you remember."

Dakota was struck dumb, and instead of replying rested her chin on her knees, her throat tightening. "You can just sit there until your family comes to pick you up," Mrs. Jay said. And with that, she walked away.

It wasn't long after Brendan's mother left, dragging Brendan along with her (she'd no doubt seen Brendan patting the front of his pants and guessed what had happened) before the rest of the hyenas circled in like she was a wounded gazelle.

Laughing...all of them. Still keeping a wide berth, lest Dakota take a swipe at them, they encircled her so that there was no escape for the former queen bee save for the inside of her own eyelids. Many were pointing and chortling with the forced and over enunciated "Ha-ha-ha-ha" of children who knew something was funny and that they should laugh, but didn't really "get it." The so-called adults did nothing to restrain them. No calls for them to get back or leave her alone in her "time out". If anything, they made up for the empty hollow laughter with their own genuine brand of mockery.

This was the stuff of madness; the stuff of nightmares. Dakota had long been used to being the center of attention, but not like this. Even with her eyes slammed shut, Dakota was acutely aware of the hot tears pouring out of her eyes and even more aware of how that was making her poorly applied mascara run even more.

Clown.

Clown whore.

Baby clown whore.

BABY clown whore.

Make it stop.

makeitstopmakeitstopmakeitstop

Make. It. STOP.

Dakota was sobbing openly, her own wails of misery drowning out the laughter of the surrounding babies. She was beyond words, beyond any feeling but pure panicked self-pitying sadness completely overwhelming her.

She didn't know when the laughing stopped, or exactly how long she'd been rocking back and forth on that little stool, but when the laughter died down and she finally heard her own pitiful cries, the party was all but over. The few remaining "children" were playing quietly with each other or otherwise being corralled by their parents. As her vision cleared, Dakota looked down at the palms of her hands, now stained in smudged blacks and reds.

"Fuck my life...." she whispered to herself.

"Dakota?" A strangely familiar voice caused the former sex-kitten to look up from her hands. The girl, a young woman really, was dressed stylishly in a bright blue dress that stopped mid-thigh, a matching leather purse slung over one shoulder. She had Dakota's blonde hair, but more of a runner's physique, with perky little breasts and long slender legs that were only accentuated by the two inch heels she wore. If she were wearing a diaper like every other young adult, it definitely didn't show. "What's wrong baby-girl?"

Dakota almost didn't recognize the woman, but in seeing her she recognized herself. They hadn't seen each other in close to four years, and Dakota had decided to skip her high school graduation last year on the grounds of "she had plans" when in reality she just couldn't be bothered to remember. Yet it occurred to her that the very outfit she was wearing, the Dora The Explorer T-Shirt and wet diaper, even the pig tails was from one of her earliest memories of the young woman.

That childhood memory of the newcomer was forever burned into Dakota's brain as what a baby looked like. But back then, the other woman had come by it honestly. Now, it was Dakota who looked like the rugrat.

The light bulb finally clicked. "Virginia?" Dakota gasped. Virginia was her sister; her little sister.

"Yeah?" Virginia asked, smiling. "What's up, kiddo? Ready to go home?"

Shakily, Dakota stood up. Emotionally the bottom had just dropped out from under her. She was so confused. Why wasn't Virginia being treated like some formula sucking freak? Before she could even voice such a question, Dakota felt the bottom drop out of her intestines, and within seconds, the back of her diaper had filled up beneath her.

### 3.

#### **Kelsey**

Kelsey was at war with herself. Did she allow a complete stranger to violate her personal space without her consent or did she at least struggle and kick as hard as she could? Maybe find a way to wriggle free from the strap holding her down to the padded table and get out of this mad kiddie carnival. In most circumstances, her victory condition would have been injuring the person forcing themselves on her and getting away to freedom. In this case, however, victory and escape would also mean that she'd remain encased within her own feces.

So did she try to escape, or did she swallow her pride and let the stranger go to work on her most intimate of areas. Kelsey refused to acknowledge the situation for what it was- a diaper change. She was an adult! Only infants and invalids got their diapers changed, and no matter what this crazy bitch said, Kelsey was neither! Still...a fresh diaper had to feel better than a messy one....

As the nurse snapped on the fresh pair of vinyl gloves she'd taken out, Kelsey's hands began to tingle and twitch, instinctively readying themselves to block and bat at the lady's hands the moment they came anywhere near her diaper; poopy or not.

They made eye contact, and the nurse looked down to Kelsey's nervously shaking hands. "Still think you're a big girl?" the nurse asked.

"Uh-huh", Kelsey nodded, meekly.

"You're not thinking about getting all squirmy on me are you?"

"...kinda."

The nurse, clad in her pink scrubs, threw back her head a little and groaned a bit. "Come on, sweetie, don't make this difficult for me. There are plenty of other Forbies out there waiting for their turn to get changed."

"Then change them first," Kelsey replied through clenched teeth.

The nurse ran her head through her red hair, and sighed. "But honey, I don't want you to get a rash. That wouldn't be comfortable would it?" Kelsey remained silent. This woman could twist Kelsey's words around with the finest sophistry this side of Seuss. There was no actual real-world logic to her arguments, so Kelsey new better than to argue with her. "Oh come on," the nurse pressed. "you're twenty-two. You've had your diaper changed plenty of times."

"Not since I was like, two," Kelsey insisted. The nurse barked laughter, but quickly covered her mouth when she saw that her charge was dead serious.



Kelsey's captor leaned over her and grabbed at something. "Okay, you wanna prove you're grown-up?" Kelsey looked straight up. Into her view, tantalizingly close, dangling just a foot or two above her, was a mobile. Bugs, Daffy, Tweetie, the Looney Toons, all in diapers hovered out of her head. "If you want to prove you're a big girl," the nurse said, "if you can grab the toys before I finish changing your diaper, then you're a big girl. Okay."

It didn't take a near bachelor's in psychology for Kelsey to see that she was being strung along with an impossible task. There was no way she could reach out and grab Baby Bugs or Baby Daffy from her spot on the changing table. And yet..

"Deal."

The nurse smiled. "Atta girl." She reached for the tapes on Kelsey's ruined diaper.

"Ready...set..."

RRIIIP

Kelsey's hands shot skyward, feebly reaching and grabbing for the plush characters hanging tantalizingly above her. She moved her left shoulder, then her right. The strap holding her down was more than doing its job, and trying to sit up would do no good.

Tunnel vision took over, and Kelsey became all but numb to time and space beyond the vortex created by the swirling plushies above her.

The only way she kept track of time was by the sensation of cold wet baby wipes being dragged across her vagina and backside. Silently, Kelsey prayed that she'd really done a number on herself, the more cleaning she needed, the more time she had. If she could just twist a little more under the restraint, she could at the very least make this red headed bimbo look like a fool.

Her legs were irrelevant right now, and so Kelsey didn't notice when they were gently set back down on soft, clean, fresh padding. She was so busy going for the Baby Bugs plushy she was panting, and didn't detect the sweet fresh scent of baby powder being sprinkled on her delicates.

So close. So close. Her fingertips were just beginning to brush the bottom of Baby Daffy's foot when-

"Done."

Kelsey's looked up from her spot on the changing table. "Done?"

“Done,” the nurse repeated. Kelsey’s eyes didn’t deceive her. Between her legs, wrapped around her ass and fastened around her waist was a brand new, fresh, thick, crinkly, (and clean) disposable diaper. Kelsey stared in awe as the woman pushed Kelsey’s legs and hips back into the air with one hand, so that she could yank down the denim of Kelsey’s shorts back down over the diaper. “You were a very good girl,” the nurse assured Kelsey. “Still a baby,” she added, refastening the snaps on the inseam of Kelsey’s shorts, “but a good baby.”

Kelsey sat up, feeling confused and disoriented as the nurse released the strap and helped her to a sitting position. “Thank you?” she said, standing to her feet and being led back out into the sunlight.

“You’re very welcome,” the nurse said as she walked Kelsey outside. Kelsey sucked in her breath as the lady in the pink scrubs gave her diapered bum a little pat, before walking to the front of the line, and leading another forever baby back into the tent.

Tentatively, Kelsey took a few more steps out of the changing area and back into the courtyard. Her last diaper—her first one in two decades if memory had served—had snuck up on her, manifesting where her panties used to be. This one was forcibly put on her, and even though it felt snug and secure, something felt off about it. She was hyper aware of every step she took, feeling like her new diaper was a second or two behind her, like a thin pelvic cast. The nappy was new, and like a crisp pair of sneakers, it needed to be broken in a bit before it was comfortable.

Experimenting, Kelsey put her feet together and tried to close her legs. Her knees touched, but just barely and with great effort. She spread her legs like she was doing a jumping jack and then brought them together again. There was a little more give this time. Good. Progress was being made.

She turned her knees outward squatted a bit and heard the crinkling loud and clear, but with each continued squat, the diaper was becoming more and more pliable. Breathing in, Kelsey reached up towards the sky, no stuffies in sight, but the stretch felt good. Then, breathing out, she bent over, touching the ground (and got a whiff of her baby powdered bottom to boot).

Better. Not great (she was still in a diaper, to be fair) but better. The diaper was still fresh and clean, but sufficiently broken in for the time being. A shiver ran down the girl’s spine. She dearly hoped that she wouldn’t have to break in another diaper ever again. But the cold, rational, scientific part of her brain told her that given the circumstances that was unlikely; not unless she found a way to escape this place.

How to do that, though? There were college goons all over the perimeter, and every single one of them was talking to her as if twenty-two and two were the exact same age.

“Pookie?” A deep, concerned voice called. Kelsey whipped her head around so fast, the back end of her wild curly hair swished around and brushed her lips. The deep, familiar voice came from a big man with a bigger gut. He lacked the beard, but he’d played Santa on more than one Christmas in her youth. At present he was wearing khaki shorts, socks and sandals, and a Deadpool t-shirt, along with the same frazzled curly hair that Kelsey had. Beside him was a woman who was only a few inches taller than Kelsey, herself, her strawberry blonde hair forever cut short and sensibly.

“Mommy?” Kelsey yelped. “Daddy?”

“Hi Kelsey”, Mom waved rapidly, her hand a blur. Without the slightest bit of hesitation, Kelsey dashed into their arms, their laughter and embrace a balm to her psyche. She barely even noticed the waddle in her gait as she ran this time. Her salvation had arrived, and with no involvement or agency on her part: A true Deus ex Machina, and she couldn’t have been more relieved.

The embrace loosened a bit, and Kelsey unburied her face and looked back up at her parents. “What are you guys doing here?”

Dad gave one of his big goofy grins. “Why wouldn’t we be here? You’re our most favorite girl in the whole world, Pookie.”

“We finished our errands and wanted to come spend some time with you,” Mom spoke more plainly.

Her parents lived in town, but they typically called ahead when they were planning a visit. Why were they here, now? More importantly, what was going to happen to them?

Only the people in the University T-shirts or the scrubs- the people working this freaky little carnival- seemed to be unaffected by whatever force had altered her clothing (and potty training). What if her parents got put in diapers too? She had to escape with them before whatever had transformed her into a giant baby did the same to them.

Panic beginning to set back in, Kelsey took her parents hands. “Talk later” she said. “Let’s get out of here.” One parent’s arm on each hand, Kelsey broke off into a run towards the exit. Together they would plow through the guards like a gigantic game of red rover.

The resulting whiplash from her parents yanking her backwards was almost comical as she fell back into her father’s arms. “What’s the hurry, Pookie?” he asked, chuckling. “We’ve got another couple hours before we go home.”

“Daddy, you don’t understand,” Kelsey said, pulling away from her father, “we have to get out of here before...before...I don’t know what happens.”

Mom gave Dad a knowing look. "Looks like someone has already gotten into the candy and juice boxes," she said. "Her imagination always gets over active when she's had too much sugar." Dad nodded in agreement.

"No, you guys!" Kelsey protested. "This place is completely bonkers!"

Kelsey's Mom frowned slightly, as if not understanding Kelsey and trying to discern what was really bothering her. "But Kelsey," Mom said, "you love playgrounds."

"Normally, yeah," Kelsey said, still tugging at her parents' arms. "but-"

Dad interrupted with, "They've got a bouncy house. Have you taken a turn on that, yet, Pookie?"

The poor girl didn't stop tugging. "No, not yet, Daddy, we gotta-"

"What about the ball pit?" Mom suggested. "That looks fun. You love jumping in the ball pit every time we go to Chuck E. Cheese." In her haste, the fact that Kelsey hadn't been to a Chuck E. Cheese with her parents since she was twelve went right over her head.

"How about the slide?" Dad added. "Slide could be fu-"

"DADDY!" Kelsey screamed. "MOMMY! STOP! I NEED TO TALK!" Both parents stopped dead in their tracks, a genuine look of worry and concern in their face.

Both Mom and Dad let go of her hands. "Okay, Kelsey," Mom said. "Just use your words, please."

As articulate as she could manage, Kelsey explained: "Mom, this place is crazy! It's not just some campus carnival or whatever." Kelsey continued to back towards the exit, hoping her parents would follow. They did. "They won't let me leave, or go to the po..." she paused before correcting herself, "...the bathroom. And everybody here thinks that we're some kind of giant ba-" The back of Kelsey's heel came up against an upturned cobblestone. It was little more than a piece of debris, but the combination of walking backwards, Kelsey's own disorientation, and the bulky waddle she'd only recently adopted caused her to completely lose her balance and send her flying.

Time slowed down in that instant, Kelsey fell back, her legs kicking and splitting as her arms flailed; she was a cat desperately trying to twist and contort in mid-air so that she might land on her feet, but to no avail.

POP! POP! POP! POP! POP! POP!

Like a machine gun, the snaps on the bottom of Kelsey's shorts rattled loose. For the second time that day, Kelsey was on her back, legs up in the air, and with a big white puffy (but clean) diaper on full display. The future psychologist looked down at her newly re-exposed diaper, and turned a deep crimson.

"It's not what you think," the words babbled out of her, "I didn't...I mean...I'm not into...this isn't what it looks like!"

Mom walked over to her and took a closer look at her crotch. Kelsey froze, feeling her mother's intense scrutiny. This was going to be a much longer story than she was ready to tell. Then Mom did the unthinkable: She slipped two fingers into the leg bands of Kelsey's diaper and felt around. Kelsey's breath caught in her chest. Her mother was checking her diaper, and in public no less! "Dry," Mom said a little too loudly so that Dad could hear. "Hold still, honey, Mommy will get you buttoned back up." Without even waiting for her daughter's consent, Kelsey's Mom began snapping back the buttons and re-covering the diaper area.

"I'd figure she'd be dry," Dad said, walking closer. "She just walked out of the changing area." As soon as Mom was done with Kelsey's crotch snaps, Dad reached for Kelsey's hand and helped her up. "Ready to go play, Pookie?"

That's when it finally hit home for poor Kelsey; there was no escape. She had finally gotten what she had always wanted (and then some.) No one would ever think less of her for liking little kid things again.

"Yeah, Daddy..." Kelsey said, holding back a sob. "Sure. Let's go play."

#### 4.

#### Dakota

“What the hell, Virginia?!” Dakota demanded to know as she was being strapped into the giant car seat in the back of her little sister’s convertible. “Not you, too!”

Virginia, fastened the clasp across Dakota’s chest. “Hush now, Dakota,” she said. “Brendan’s Mom told me exactly how naughty you were, and the proof is right there on your face. You know better than to play with big-girl things.”

“No I don’t!” Dakota protested, not realizing how stupid she sounded until she’d already said it. Virginia ignored her older sister, instead inserting the final metal clasps into the buckle, securing the twenty-two-year-old forever baby into her prison chair.

“Damn it,” Virginia cursed, “your diaper is so swollen it’s hard to buckle.” It was true. The saturated, full thing bulged so much that Dakota had no wiggle room below the waist. The disgusting lump in the back didn’t make it any better.

“I didn’t bring any diapers and I’m not about to go back inside after the embarrassment you’ve caused me,” Virginia said. “You can get changed when we get home.” The younger sibling walked around to the driver’s seat. “Good thing I brought the convertible,” she mentioned. “I don’t know if I could stand the smell if the top was up.”

Dakota wriggled pathetically in her wet and dirty diaper as her sister started the car, the grainy texture of her mess causing her skin to itch the more she thought about it. Stupid Virginia. Such a bitch. Always the copycat. Everything about her was just a slight variation on an act that Dakota had perfected years before. Even her personality was a hand-me-down. “Why aren’t you in a diaper?” she asked. “Aren’t you younger than me?”

“Exactly,” Virginia said as the car pulled onto the slow and gentle roads of the Country Club. “I’m younger than you.”

“Huh?”

A tittering, condescending laugh rang out into the air- a laugh almost identical to Dakota’s when one of her boyfriends said something so stupid as to be adorable. “I’m too young to be a forever baby, honey. No one my age is.”

Craning her neck so that she could make eye contact in the rear view mirror, Dakota asked, “But you will be in a few years? When you’re my age?”

Virginia shook her head. “Nope. Just people your age, give or take a year or two.”

“Why?”

If Virginia gave an answer, Dakota didn't hear it over the turned up radio and the wind began to rush past her head. Dakota growled a bit under her breath. By her reckoning Dakota had two problems: She didn't understand what had happened to her, and she was sitting in her feces. If her sense of direction and recollection were correct, (they were) it would take at least a half hour to get to the house where she grew up. She did not like the idea of that. Time for a change of tactics.

“Ginneeeeeeeee,” Dakota whined from the backseat. “I need a change, nowwww!”

The car slowed down at a stop sign. “Nope,” Virginia said. “Sorry kiddo. No diapers.”

Dakota's mind raced. If she was effectively a baby.... “Can't you get a travel pack at a gas station on the way?”

“Why would I do that?” Virginia asked.

Dakota pouted out her lip. “Cuz you wuv me?”

“Yeah,” Virginia agreed. “But I don't ‘wuv’ changing your stinky diapers. Daddy'll change you when we get home.”

The blood rushed out of Dakota's face. Daddy. Dakota hadn't thought of that. Memories of her childhood from before she'd figured out how to manipulate the old man ran through her head. Dad had been a real “Spare the rod spoil the child” type; and Dakota had been a “don't get caught and you don't have to face the rod” type. She'd been caught though. “But...but...but...” Dakota started crying. She really did want to cry, but she was hastening the process for effect. “But he'll spank me!”

“Shouldn't have been naughty.” Virginia replied, putting her foot on the accelerator.

“HE'LL SPANK ME BEFORE HE CHANGES ME!” Dakota yelled.

“Probably,” Virginia agreed. “Should have thought about that before you misbehaved.”

“IT WAS BECAUSE OF A BOY!”

The breaks screeched. Virginia pulled off the side of the road and turned around to look her older sister in the eye “What did you say?”

Here was her chance! “Brendan said he didn't want to marry me!” Dakota heard the words tumble out of her mouth. Her social survival instinct was on full throttle. “He didn't want to marry

me because I was too little to ever get married so I took the big people makeup to make myself look bigger so that he'd say yes!" This wasn't the case by a longshot, but there was just enough elements of truth in it to sound believable to someone who wasn't there. Fortunately, Virginia hadn't been there. Dakota willed herself to cry more, causing the makeup to drip down even more of her face.

Virginia sighed. "It's a good thing you're cute." She started driving again and turned into a nearby gas station just off of the entrance to the Country Club. "Let's get you cleaned up, poopy pants. All of you."

"You mean...?" Dakota said, trying to hide the triumphant smile creeping at the corners of her mouth.

Virginia twisted her lips to the side. "Daddy doesn't have to know about this." Then she repeated. "It really is a good thing you're cute."

Dakota had finally gotten what she'd always wanted. No responsibility. To be the center of attention and be able to get by on her looks and charisma instead of any particular marketable skill set. And to never have to worry about getting married to some boring dunce.



## 5.

### Susan

Susan woke up on a smooth plastic padded mat, surrounded by mesh netting, her dreams already melting away into wherever forgotten memories go when they're given up. It was a good dream, though, the accounting major remembered that part, at least, even if the details of the dream were already so much suds down the bathtub drain. Anywhere outside of her own waking dream of a world was an upgrade in comparison.

Blurry eyes focused in on a small puddle of drool glossing over a plastic laminated Baby Kermit on the floor of her playpen. Playpen. That was it. That explained the plastic matting and mesh netting around the periphery, tickling her now bare feet. Mom had taken off her shoes before plunking her in here.

The young woman shifted a bit, debating whether or not to go back to sleep in the semi-fetal position she'd woken up in; her old stuffed rabbit, Flopsy lovingly cradled in the crook of her left arm.

She didn't even get a yawn in edgewise before her brain kicked into complete wakefulness, and she remembered the bizarre and humiliating circumstances up to this point. Being careful not to let go of Flopsy, Susan pushed herself up to a sitting position with her left arm as her right latched onto the mesh netting, and felt the soft wet squish on her bum like an overused sanitary pad that was deeply in need of changing.

Hadn't she already been changed? Recent memories of laying on a wooden bus stop bench while her mother cleaned her private parts confirmed this. Refusing to believe what her own backside was telling her, she lifted up the frilly pink dress that had manifested on her and looked down between her legs. The diaper-and it was a diaper-had ballooned out like one of those dinky little sponge toys...only it wasn't water that was causing it to swell up. A slight discoloration, not quite yellow, but decidedly not pristine unused white gave more proof to what Susan still didn't want to admit to herself.

With her free hand, Susan reached down and gave her padded privates a squeeze, and the not quite crisp rustling of the well worn undergarment registered in her ears once more; the bulk between her thighs giving way like an overripe melon.

She'd heard that crinkling in her dreams, Susan realized, or at least in the limbo between dreaming and wakefulness. Had the babyish underwear's signature sound already become so much white noise to her fatigued brain? Or worse yet, had she been wearing diapers in her dreams? The smell of old urine and the perfume of the diaper jumped into her nostrils, her jostling of her own personal toilet stirring a heaping helping of odor molecules into the air. Now

that she thought about it, the smell absolutely permeated the air around her. Was she already becoming smell blind to the smell of her own piss?

Her wet diaper wasn't even particularly warm, either, meaning she'd been sleeping in her own filth for a while. The sun shining in from a nearby window told her that she hadn't been asleep terribly long, but the thought of wetting herself as she slept was still disturbing. Was she a bed wetter now on top of everything else?

Susan's sense of direction kicked into gear in tandem with her own memories: The drab brown paneling along the room; the old ceiling fan stirring the air; the solid oak desk in one corner; the little cot in the other where her mother would snooze when she pulled all nighters balancing the books and going over receipts a few times every year. The Muppet Babies emblazoned playpen was new- even if it wasn't; the vaguest of long buried memories in such a colorful cage bubbled up into Susan's mind- but Susan knew exactly where she was.

Mom's office in the back of the diner.

Susan had spent an uncountable number of hours here. First, when she was a little girl, and Janet needed her out of the way, safely out of reach of the fryers and hot skillet. Later, when she was a middle schooler working on homework after school. And of course, there was when she was an overworked and moody teenager trying to get a moment's peace between her mother's nagging, the heat of the grill, and busy hands from another old lecher old enough to be her grandfather.

Looks like she was back to being the little girl that needed to be locked away for her own safety again. Flopsy still in hand, Susan reached up to the padded railing and pulled herself up to a standing position, her wet diaper beginning to sag and trying lamely to drag her back down to the mat.

"Damn," she cursed, looking back down at the diaper, the cartoon characters on the front oblivious to their backsides being covered in human piss. The dress was still absolutely worthless as far as preserving her modesty went; even less so now that the diaper was filled and hanging off her hips. "My kingdom for a pair of pants," the accounting major moaned. The way her mother had been acting lately- shit...the way everyone had been acting lately- the best she could hope for would be a diaper cover or plastic panties. They'd likely be pink and frilly with pointless ruffles on the bottom. Screw that.

Given the choice between "babyish" and "girly and babyish", plain old unisex "babyish" would win every time. "Girly" was pretty much a disqualifier every time.

Using her free hand to readjust the glasses strapped to her head, Susan took a moment to collect herself. The playpen was decidedly bigger than average. The top came up to her breasts. It would be easy enough to swing her leg over the side she supposed, but it was still

much larger than a typical playpen. A good chunk of her Mom's office was taken up by the playpen, it was big enough to where she could lay in it, even if it she couldn't fully stretch out.

Based on the window the sunlight was streaming in from, Susan knew that it must be the late afternoon, with the busy, muffled sound of diners chatting beyond the door reinforcing her estimate. She'd woken up just in time for the end of the Early Bird special and the beginning of the dinner rush. Suddenly the thought of escaping the playpen-of being forced to trot out there in a pink frilly dress and a wet diaper...possibly even be forced to work-occurred to her and her blood ran cold. The playpen seemed pretty nice all of a sudden. At least she could suffer in privacy here.

Susan drew in her rediscovered stuffed rabbit into her arms and gave the thing a hug. "What the hell, Flopsy? What the hell?"

The immediate shock of waking up diapered, thus assuring her that it hadn't been a dream, wore off quickly. Coupled with an almost paralyzing fear of public humiliation, Susan felt resigned to her otherwise quite escapable mesh cage.

All too soon, boredom set in and washed away anxiety. "For a playpen," Susan spoke to Flopsy, "there sure isn't a whole lot to play with, is there?" No balls, no bells, no rattles, nothing that might disturb the diners over their own yapping and gulping. There weren't even any of those crappy little cardboard books that were just as easily chewed on as they were read. Sure, there was Flopsy, but Flopsy felt less like a toy and more like a pet...or a friend....a security object at the very least; one that Susan didn't dare release. "God, I hope I can still read," Susan told her stuffed rabbit. Her potty training had all but vanished, it seemed, and her literacy might have gone the way of the dodo along with it.

Still standing- she loathed the idea of sitting back down in her own waste- she whiled away the minutes by counting ceiling tiles, then wood panels, then floor tiles. At least she could still count. Next, she started counting the number of pictures her mother had hung or placed around the otherwise dull room.

Janet did always have a thing for photographs, even long after Susan had stopped resembling the smiling little girl in the pictures. It was "to remember", she'd explained to Susan after she refused to store away the countless baby pictures and middle school photos. Frankly, Susan thought, it was because Janet could never stop seeing her daughter as anything but a child, and all the photos from pre-puberty were there to reinforce that notion; though to be fair, Susan hadn't exactly been eager or willing to provide new photos...not after that disastrous prom incident.

It was when she took the time to re-examine the photos hanging around the office, that Susan knew something had gone terribly wrong. Flopsy fell to the floor as Susan's mouth hung open in a mixture of shock, disbelief, and a pinch of disgust. The girl in the pictures had stayed the

same- Susan's picture from when she was twelve was still prominently framed on the corner of her mother's desk, for example- each one with a face that Susan herself wore at one point in her life; but everything else was different.

Elementary class photos looked more and more like pre-school shots, the bizarre contrast between the age and clothing becoming more and more stark as the years went on. Her middle school marching band picture was replaced with a picture of her thirteen year old self in a pink onesie and ribbons in her hair, blowing into a kazoo. Her first official day as a waitress when she was a freshman in high school turned into a picture of her clumsily holding a spatula while her mother blew a raspberry on her cheek. Her solo at the church Christmas concert had transmogrified into a fifteen year old Susan, obviously diapered underneath a red dress with white tights, crying on Santa's lap. Her senior prom picture was now an eighteen year old her naked on a bearskin rug, tits out and her tush up in the air, smiling happily. Baby pictures. Everything was baby pictures. The only portraits that remained intact were the ones where she'd really been a baby.

"MOTHER!" Susan's voice roared out, full of indignant rage. Nothing happened. Through the door, Susan could still hear the phone ringing, orders being taken, and the muffled walla wallas of people talking to each other. "JANET!" she called again. Still nothing. "MOM!" Just more of the garbled white noise.

"MOMMY!"

The door swung open and a sweating and slightly disheveled Janet ran in, panting. "Susie, what's wrong?"

The future accountant pointed at the mortifying pictures hanging on the wall. "THAT!" she said. Never before had Susan missed the photo of her own pumpkin toothed grin next to an inch long guppy dangling from a hook that fishing trip the summer of third grade. Instead that same pumpkin tooth grin now wore a pair of pastel pink overalls while biting on a teething ring.

Frowning in confusion, Mom walked over to the photo and examined it closely. "What about it? Was there a spider on it or something?"

"NO!" Susan shouted. "It's wrong! It's different! They're ALL different!"

"Pictures are supposed to be different," Mom started to explain as if Susan were a simpleton, "that's what makes them speci-"

Susan cut her mother off. "They're all BABY pictures!"

Susan's mother cocked her head to the side. "Well, yeah, I guess so. But that's because you're a baby."

"I'M NOT A BABY!"

"You're my baby," Janet retorted in a chorus reserved for young children as old as parenting itself.

The young woman in the playpen huffed. "Not what I'm talking about, and you know it."

Now it was Janet's turn to huff, though in truth it came out more as a tired sigh. "Mommy's working, honey. We can talk about this later." She let out a quiet whisper of "forever babies", that Susan was sure she wasn't supposed to hear.

"No, I want to talk about it, now." Susan stomped her foot, causing the entire playpen to rattle a bit. "Everything is wrong! I'm NOT a baby. I'm NOT a forever baby! I'm NOT supposed to be in this stupid frilly dress! I'm NOT supposed to be in this stupid playpen! I'm not supposed to be in this...this..." Her rant was cut short by her mother walking over and slipping her fingers into her diaper.

"As long as I'm here," Mom said. "Let's change your diaper."

"NOT AGAIN!" Susan shrieked.

Janet walked over and worked a latch on one side of the playpen, opening a corner of the mesh cage with a hidden door. "Yes again, Susie," she said. "You might be okay with sitting in a wet diaper all day, but I'm not. I'm the one who has to deal with you being cranky if you get a rash down there." She looked at her daughter expectantly.

"Well?"

Susan was about to take a step outside of the playpen, and stopped. "Don't make me come in there after you," Mom warned. Susan did want out of this wet diaper, to be honest. Something was wrong though. Out of the corner of her eyes, she saw Flopsy strewn about on the playpen floor, dropped and forgotten. Quickly, she picked the rabbit up and stepped out.

Within three steps out of the playpen, her mother had taken her hand and guided her over to the little cot. It now doubled as a changing table, apparently. The events of the bus stop played themselves out all over again, with her dress being flipped up, what passed for her underwear being ripped off, and then having her pelvis wiped for her, all while clutching her toy rabbit. The only appreciable difference was the changing surface was slightly softer and the privacy was better; that and Mom sprinkled some baby powder on her before sealing her into a new diaper.

"Up ya go," Mom said, grabbing Susan's arms and pulling her into a sitting position on top of the little cot. "I bet that feels better, doesn't it, baby girl?"

A fresh diaper taped onto her hips, a fresh idea popped into Susan's head. She might not be able to convince her mother that she belonged out of baby clothes, but perhaps she could get some answers. "Mommy," she began, "why am I a forever baby?"

Janet looked anxiously towards the door, as if she had something better to do than answer her daughter's inane questions. "Honey, can't we talk about this later?"

Susan clutched her mother by the waist. "Please tell me. I really, really, reawwy need ta know." Whether the slip into a more childish lisp was intentional or not, even Susan couldn't say for sure.

Her mother pried Susan's hands away with an uncanny strength, "Susie, I've already told you plenty of times," she said, going for the door.

"I forgot," Susan lied, at least she hoped she was lying. The idea that perhaps her entire life up to this point had been imaginary had not yet occurred to her and would have filled her with existential dread if it had. "I'm just a forever baby, 'member?"

Janet stopped in her tracks, and slumped her head a bit. Just when it looked like she was about to leave, she stuck her head out the door and called out, "Phyllis! I'm taking a break."

"Sure thing, boss!" the restaurant's elderly majordomo called back

Susan's mother closed the door and walked over to a mini fridge that Susan didn't remember being there before the world decided she should be a giant toddler. She reached into the little black box and pulled out a large baby bottle filled with the watered down milky white stuff Susan had been chugging down earlier "Here," she said, placing.

"You're a little dehydrated. You drink, and I'll talk."

"What is it?" Susan asked.

"Baby formula."

"It's not gonna turn me into a baby, is it?"

Mom barked laughter at that. "Where do you get this stuff, Susie?" The worry didn't evaporate from Susan's face. "No," Janet said. "But it's a good meal substitute for you when you're bein' a picky eater or I don't have the time to cook for you. In this case, it's a bit of both lately," she added. "Drink up."

Susan let Flopsy drop into her lap and accepted the offered rubber teat into her mouth, grabbing the bottle with both hands as she began to chug down the stuff. "So..." she mumbled between gulps. "...why?"

"Why are you a forever baby?" Mom asked. Susan nodded, sending the baby formula sloshing around in the bottle. Mom sat down next to her on the cot, and draped her arm over Susan's shoulders, taking her in a half-hug. "Well," she began, her eyes taking on a far off and almost dreaming look. "It all started when you were two, maybe two and a half. You were just starting to get to be a big girl, and I was just starting to think about potty training you, when something happened."

"Whuh?" Susan asked from behind the rubber nipple, faux milk dribbling out the corner of her lips. She started fidgeting in her seat a bit; the crisp clean crinkle of the fresh diaper drowned out by the glug glugging of the baby bottle.

Mom continued. "All over the world, kids started...going backwards."

Susan started rocking a bit on the cot, her knees flexing and testing themselves, her bare feet pushing up just a bit from the floor, as if readying themselves for something. Boy was the floor cold. "Backwa-?"

"Don't interrupt, Susie. Mommy's talking." Susan resealed her lips around the nipple and continued suckling while her mother talked.

"Kids who were only a year or two older than you started wetting their pants and going poopy in their big kid undies." Susan looked to her mother, eyebrows arched in question. The slightest fart creeped out of her, unnoticed by either mother or daughter. As a general rule of politeness Susan wasn't in the habit of breaking wind in public, but she was too engrossed in the story to notice.

Her mother put her arm around her and snuggled up a little closer. "When people stop being babies, they learn to go pee pee and poo poo in the potty instead of their diapers, just like Mommy does." Janet explained to her daughter, completely missing the source of Susan's confusion. "I tried potty training you, and it just wasn't happening."

That was a lie, Susan knew. She had been notoriously easy to potty train, she knew from some of Mom's more embarrassing chit-chat with other kid's mothers through the years. She drew her feet up onto the cot, packaging herself in a little bundle while her guts quietly rumbled; her toes curling on the thin and well worn blanket that had just served as her impromptu changing mat. Much better.

Mom continued her own revised narrative. "Then the news kept coming in from around the world. Big kids were forgetting how to dress themselves, how to feed themselves with spoons

or drink from cups, how to talk like a big kid, how to control their emotions and not throw temper tantrums...pretty much everything that they could do that made them more grown up stopped happening.”

“Buh why?” Susan mumbled around her half-finished bottle. One delicate hand gripped the frame of the cot while her feet got further underneath her. Still sucking on her bottle, she looked something like a little monkey, all crouched up with three limbs flat on the bed.

“Nobody knows,” Mom shrugged. “Some people thought it was a virus. Some people thought it was something in the water or the food. Some people thought it was an attack by very bad people called ‘terrorists’. Some people thought it was the cartoons you were watching. Some people didn’t know what to think. All we knew was that pretty much everyone that year who wasn’t already in Kindergarten had stopped growing up, and were getting less and less grown-up every day. They had to go back into diapers, and drink from bottles and sippy cups, and they started forgetting their ABC’s and one-two-threes.”

Susan was sucking on air soon, the bottle half consumed, its payload mostly delivered, but the young lady still felt the urge- the need- to keep her mouth busy. She tilted her head back so that the rest of the formula would slide down her throat.

“Scientists ran tests,” Mom continued, “and eventually told everybody that you and everybody else close to your age would never grow up. You’d only get so big, even if you continued to grow...but that maturity wise, you’d stop.”

The bottle dropped from Susan’s mouth. “That doesn’t make any sense!” she protested. “You can’t measure maturity!” A soft grunt escaped Susan’s lips, barely audible to even the most trained ear. Susan sat back on her rump on reflex, not fully understanding or appreciating what was happening to her even as she spoke. Something was fighting to get out of her, and it wasn’t just indignation. But her body knew that the only way to keep it all in for the time being was to literally sit tight.

Mom caught the bottle as quickly as if she’d been expecting it and shoved it back into Susan’s mouth. “Science, honey. Science. You can’t argue with science. So we didn’t. Nobody did. The baby companies just kept making diapers and clothes and toys in your size, and you became forever babies. You just kept going to bigger and bigger daycares that got built special for you and your friends instead of school.”

“But...” Susan mumbled and grunted between gulps of formula, “I fot...I was...gonna...work here...”

Mom chuckled good naturedly as if her child had just said something positively adorable. “You’re always gonna be my little helper, Susie, but you’re never going to have to work here.” There was an almost manic twinkle in her mother’s eyes. “That’s the best part. You’re not gonna



grow up,” Mom said, “but that means that I get to be your mommy forever and ever. You’re my forever baby, and I get to be your forever mommy. You’re never gonna outgrow any of your baby stuff and you’re never gonna work here.” Then she added, “and I couldn’t be happier.”

“But...other kids...?” Susan wondered. “They’re not forever babies.”

“Yeah,” Mommy smiled. “Every kid born after that year grew up normally. I guess I just lucked out.” She pinched Susan’s cheek.

Susan felt her throat tighten up and an overwhelming, primal force surge through her gut. Her cheeks puffed out a little bit as she blew bubbles into the baby bottle. Feet firmly planted on the cot, she grabbed the bed frame, lifted her bum just off the mattress and squatted as she pushed a solid mass of poop into the back of her diaper. Her conscious mind registered the act, but for some reason wasn’t even remotely bothered by it while her feces pressed up against her diaper and smeared against her backside. As she shat herself, a stupid grin spread across her lips and a single word flashed over and over again in her mind.

POOPIE.

Only when she was done, and she planted her bare feet back on the solid floor, did she sit back down on the cot, and the smile of relief faded into a shudder of revulsion. She wanted to scream suddenly, not because she was bothered by the act of defecating in her panties, but because she hadn’t been bothered by it. Susan knew she should be, though, and the fact that she wasn’t was what disturbed her most.

What had she done? “I...I...poopied?” Susan asked her mother.

“Figures,” Mom sighed before getting up and grabbing another diaper from a nearby stack. “I put you in a dry diaper and then you poop minutes later. Never fails.” She patted the spot where Susan’s head had been just minutes before. “Okay Susie,” she commanded, “lay back down.”

As she found herself obeying her mommy’s command for yet another diaper change, the weight of her current reality bore down on her. She had gotten what she’d always wanted. She’d never have to work in this stupid restaurant ever again and wouldn’t even need a half-hearted backup plan. She’d gotten what she wanted... and all it had cost her was everything she’d had. This was the world now, she knew.

Deep in the vastness of space, what might've been a slumbering god ceased to exist as it had; its magic all spent up, its purpose completed. It didn't die, for scientifically speaking, it had never strictly been alive; but what does magic care of science?

In its place was an eternally burning corpse, the gleam of its self-made funeral pyre taking decades to reach Earth.

## **CHAPTER 4**

*It is an interesting but often overlooked bit of trivia that the most adept of magicians throughout history are either extremely young or extremely elderly. Merlin, the most famous Wizard known to mankind (that wouldn't be considered blasphemous in labeling his mystical prowess as "magic" as opposed to "divine miracles") was born an old man and was said to age backwards, making him BOTH very old and young at the same time.*

*History and fiction is filled with such examples of arcane practitioners being either notably old and frail or fantastically young and inexperienced. To the less talented, less aware among us it might be thought that magic is so difficult that it either requires years of experience and wisdom, or else can only be wielded by child prodigies.*

*This conclusion is patently false. The idea that magic is something that requires either tremendous talent or immense practice couldn't be further from the truth. All that real magic needs to turn human desire and fantasy into hard, cold reality is strong enough belief. It's really just a matter of a bumblebee in flight; just ignore what the rest of the world says about you and do as you wish.*

*And therein lies the rub: Even before the twin tyrannies of science and cynicism, people of a certain age eventually learned that the world doesn't bend to their whims just because they wanted it to, and in learning so, robbed themselves of magic. Ergo, the people most capable of casting magic are those who are too naïve to know that they can't, or too senile to remember.*

- An excerpt from "Do You Believe in Magic?" by Cornelius Crowley.

### **1.**

#### **Susan**

Susan waddled into the "Big Little Daycare", holding her mother's hand as tightly as any small child on the first day of school, with Flopsy clutched to her chest. The world had gone mad yesterday, with everyone she could remotely consider part of her peer group now being reduced to a particularly large toddler complete with all the trappings: bottles, highchairs, strollers, cribs, playpens, rattles, and yes, diapers. Susan had already endured one day of such indignities, and since everyone on planet Earth couldn't remember a time when she and her peers weren't expected to behave like someone under the age of two, there was no end in sight.

In the face of this unrelenting madness, it could be forgiven if she went a little crazy herself; or at least fell back on long abandoned habits. "Susie," her mother said, "why are you holding onto my hand so tightly? You're just going to daycare. You've come here ever since you were eight."

The former future accountant's hand did not loosen its grip, though the hairs on the back of her neck still bristled at being called "Susie". By God, she hated that name. "I know," she lied, "I'm just nervous, that's all."

"About what?" Mom asked. "Is something different today? I don't remember any special activities being mentioned in the bulletin." As far as everyone but Susan was concerned, today was par for the course, but to Susan it was like being on another world.

Her room, long since abandoned since she'd gone to college had, of course, been a scaled up nursery. Bath time had been...interesting...but being naked and scrubbed down by her own mother was nothing compared to having her ass wiped in public. The latter had been red hot humiliation. The former, mentally, could be written off as something that might happen in a hospital.

Going to sleep in a crib wearing purple footed pajamas had been deceptively easy. Waking up wet the next morning had even easier. Getting dressed- correction, BEING dressed- for the day came too fast for Susan's groggy brain to fully appreciate. As soon as the shoes were on her feet, Mom had shuffled her outside, strapped her into a ridiculously big carseat, shoved another bottle of big baby formula into her mouth, and driven off into the pre-dawn morning. Susan hadn't even had time to process that she wasn't being taken back to Ma's Diner and Pie Shop; she was expecting to have another boring day of quiet contemplation stuck in a playpen.

Now, as other so-called forever babies trickled into the building with their parents, their pants all bulging with bulky diapers (if they were wearing pants at all), the enormity of Susan's predicament had fully dawned on her. What was she going to do?

In front of the rather large building- just yesterday Susan remembered this place being an abandoned bingo hall- was a large screen T.V. where several other forever babies (other forever babies) laid on the floor watching the opening previews; evidently, whatever DVD had been popped in had yet to play the feature presentation.

Not quite fifteen feet away, other Forbies sat at long tables eating grainy pre-packaged doughnuts and cheerios. No spoons. Just finger feeding. Hovering around them, a woman in her thirties passed out juice boxes and sippy cups, taking a moment here and there to open up the plastic wrapping of a doughnut or tear the paper lid off of a single serving bowl of cereal. The infantilized twenty-somethings seemed to know at least to raise their hand and whine for help, rather than attempt the feat themselves.

What if this was all some advanced form of brainwashing and conditioning rather than a virus? Maybe this was a kind of mass hypnosis or global hysteria. What if the non-Forbies were just as mesmerized as the millennials content to poop their pants?

“Go get some breakfast,” Susan’s mother nudged her forward, giving her a pat on the rear. Susan barely felt it through the plastic, padding, and diaper cover she’d been dressed in this morning.

Under the humming of old fluorescent light bulbs, amidst the sky blue walls with fluffy white clouds and different “activity centers” and toys pushed up along the periphery, Susan finally got a good look at what she was wearing...and had to fight back the urge to vomit.

Mom had dressed her in a sleeveless red dress with white polka dots. The hem was longer than yesterday’s frilly pink number, but it still only barely covered the bottom of her diaper area. Pulled up over her taped-on absorbent underwear was a matching cover – she immediately loathed the idea of thinking of it as “panties”- and the elastic in the leg bands was already starting to chafe her inner thighs.

On top of the shoulder straps of her dress and on the hips of her diaper cover were two superfluous bits of material tied into a rough knot, giving the approximate illusion that her clothes were tied together like some kind of cute country bumpkin child.

It was supposed to be cute, Susan guessed, but the only thing it would really accomplish was make it harder for her to sleep on her side during naptime. (Please let there be a naptime. Unconsciousness was the sweetest mercy she could expect today.) Tucking Flopsy under her armpit, she brushed her backside with the tips of her fingers. No stupid ruffles on her butt. At least she had that going for her.

The young lady released her mother’s grasp just long enough to feel the top of her head. Sure enough, her fingers clasped on a headband, with a bow big and floppy enough to act as a set of wings should she fall out of plane. A mirror wasn’t needed for Susan to guess that it matched the rest of her outfit perfectly.

Her hand swept back underneath her hair, pawing at the glasses now strapped to the back of her skull. Susan was all but blind without her glasses, but that would have been preferable to being dolled up like a friggin’ baby version of Minnie Mouse.

Janet seemed to have read her daughter’s thoughts. Mother grabbed daughter’s hand, and pulled it down to her side. “Susan Leann Collins,” she chided, “quit fiddling with your glasses.”

“But Mom-!” Susan whined.

Mom wasn’t having anything on it. “Don’t you ‘But Mom’ me, baby girl,” Mom interrupted. “You’re never gonna grow up, but you’re gonna grow out of this backsass phase real quick. Understand?”

Flashbacks of yesterday's public spanking sprang to the forefront of Susan's mind. "Yes ma'am." She whimpered. That and hearing her full name had a subduing effect on her.

"Mrs. Collins!" A new voice entered the fray. Both the forever baby and her forever mommy looked up from each other. An older woman with big straw-colored hair came out of a side door and into the main floor of the old Bingo Hall. "Glad that I caught you!"

"Actually, I'm glad I caught you, Miss Donna," Mom replied. "Susie has been acting strange lately."

Miss Donna- Susan's "teacher" in this brave new world, she deduced- stopped in front of the pair and frowned. "Strange?" she repeated Susan's mom, grimacing like it left a bad taste in her mouth. "Strange how?"

Now it was Susan's turn to blanch as Mom gripped her hand a little too tight for comfort. "She's just been a little too focused on growing up, lately. Lots of talk about not being a baby, and whatnot." Mom said.

A relieved breath puffed an errant strand of hair out of Miss Donna's face. "Oh," she said. "THAT. You had me worried for a second, Mrs. Collins."

"You mean she's been doing it here, too?" Mom asked the teacher.

"Not here," Miss Donna clarified. "Not yet, anyways. Susan is twenty-two, correct?" Susan found herself nodding emphatically, and Mom was kind enough to just point to her, instead of talking over her for once. "That happens at around this age," she said by way of explanation. "When our oldest group was about Susan's age, they went through the same phase. We thought it might have something to do with how they used to be potty trained, but then our twenty-three year olds did the same thing last year and a lot of them had gotten as far as training pants."

"And Susie never came close to getting out of diapers," Mom piped in. Susan felt her face flush and her mouth go as dry as she hoped her diaper was. (Yikes! She wasn't even sure if she was wet just then!)

Miss Donna seemed to agree. "Must be something about being a forever baby at twenty-two. Which means," she paused and looked back at the not-so-little tykes watching the opening credits of Pinocchio, "I've got at least two more years of this to look forward to."

"You mean, you're not trying to do potty training with them?" Mom asked.

The other woman snorted “Of course not,” before thinking better of it and adding, “That is, if you’re wanting to, we’ll give it a try, but they don’t make forever baby disposable training pants so our best bet would be to switch to cloth diapers and plastic pa-“

She was cut off by Susan’s mom waving her hands and saying “Oh no, no, no. Not what I’m looking to do at all. I just wanted to know. I’m not interested in Susie potty training at all. My baby girl just doesn’t have it in her, and besides-”

“It’s a fad,” both women said simultaneously before pausing and laughing a little too heartily for Susan to feel comfortable.

After the relieved laughter from both women died down, Mom asked “So Susan’s not the only one at this age?”

“Not at all,” Susan’s new/old teacher assured. “I’ve got more than a couple here right now that are starting to act a little too big for their britches.”

“What about the cursing?”

“Cursing?!”

Both adults stopped and shot Susan a stern look. “I didn’t know about cursing,” the teacher said, while still looking pointedly at Susan.

“I assume she heard it from one of her little friends here,” Mom said, giving Susan’s hand a squeeze.

Both women were shaking their heads in self-righteous disappointment. “I would assume the same thing. Some parents assume that just because their children are never going to grow up, that they won’t learn naughty language,” Miss Donna said. “Thank you for telling me, Mrs. Collins. I’ll be on the lookout for that from now on. We’ll try to nip it in the bud.” She then looked Susan in the eye. “If you hear any of your classmates saying bad words, you don’t copy them, okay? You come right to me or another grown-up.” All Susan could do was nod.

Miss Donna nodded back, and then looked to Mom. “Anything else I need to know?”

Janet loosened her grip. “No, that’s about it, and I’ve gotta go get ready for the breakfast rush at the diner.” She went to go, then stopped herself. “Oh yeah, what was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

The older woman primped her hair a bit and just said, “I just wanted to tell you that we’re starting to run low on diapers for her,” gesturing to Susan. “We’ve got enough to get through today, but we’ll need more for tomorrow.”

Knees locked. Teeth gritted. Eyelids shot open. Oh shit! She was in diapers. She'd lost most, if not all of her potty training. She'd need to be changed. And Mom was about to leave her. Susan hadn't had time to consider this. It was bad enough when Mom had changed her and someone else had been looking on. Unless she could hold it all day (she couldn't), a complete stranger would be the one wiping between her legs today. Even if she were dry, that wouldn't stop some rando from groping her pelvis to check her.

"Oh, right," Mom replied, not noticing or not caring about her daughter's obvious distress. "I'll make sure to bring another box by when I pick her up this afternoon before the dinner rush." She turned around to leave.

LEAVE!

Due to how far her diaper spread her legs apart, Susan didn't leap at her mother as much as she stumbled over herself and latched onto Mom's waist. "Mommy!" she yelped. "Don't leave! Take me to the diner. I'll be good! I promise!" The idea of Miss Donna- or anyone else, really- laying her down and stripping her threatened to send her into a panic attack.

"Susie!" Mom laughed, nervously. "What has gotten into you?! You haven't cried when I left you at Daycare since you were twelve."

"I'M NOT CRYING!" she shouted, despite herself. The possible future violations flashing in her mind's eye caused her physical eyes to start watering.

Wrinkled hands with shiny red fingernails took hold of Susan's skinny shoulders. "Looks like someone's feeling like a bit of a Mommy's girl this morning," Miss Donna tutted. "It happens."

Susan got her feet back underneath her and stood ramrod straight. "MOMMY'S GIRL?!" she screeched, whirling around to face her accuser. "MOMMY'S GIRL?!" Her mother was already walking away towards the exit, but Susan didn't care. "I. AM. NOT. A. MOMMY'S GIRL!"

A patronizing pat on her head was her reward. "Of course not, Susan," Miss Donna cooed. "I just said that that's how you were feeling. How we feel and who we are aren't always the same thing. Just like sometimes people at your age feel that they're big girls."

"I..." Susan stopped. There was no point in arguing, was there? She crossed her arms and pouted. "I want breakfast."

"Of course you do, sweetie. Go find a seat and I'll bring you some cereal."

Susan stomp walked to the nearest table, the frills on her socks jiggling up and down just as the Blue Fairy made her grand entrance on the big T.V. The constricting diaper cover made it so



that her diaper didn't crinkle as much when she sat down on the hard wooden chair, but the wet squelch that she felt as much as heard was unaffected by it. "Great," she muttered as a bowl of dry Cheerios was slid in front of her. Now she had something worse than being abandoned by Mommy...her mother...to look forward to.

As the bland blonde bimbo waved her wand and granted the demented old clockmaker's wish that his marionette was a real boy, Susan thought about wishes. Silently, several wishes came to mind. She wished yesterday had never happened. She wished she was continent again. She wished that her diaper was at least dry.

She settled for voicing a lesser wish. "I wish I wasn't wearing all this girly crap," she whispered. But Susan knew that wishes didn't really come true. Not hers, anyway. Whatever was happening to her was definitely magic; she'd run out of logical explanations, and so magic seemed to do just fine. Though who in their right mind would wish for this?

The other grown toddlers munched on dry cereal and drank orange juice from sippy cups, constantly glancing up at the big screen T.V. at the front of the room, their eyes all but glued to the screen as if they were afraid to miss important plot points involving consciences and singing crickets.

Adults prodded them on, saying things like, "When you're done eating you can go watch closer." This caused a few to shovel whole grain circles into their mouths faster than their chewing could handle, sending crunched up bits of cereal spilling out of their mouths and into their laps and the floor. Seriously? Was everyone her age now *that* enthralled by an old cartoon? Had their cognitive functioning or emotional maturity diminished that greatly? Was she the only one her age that still had any trace of adult sensibilities left to her?

Susan Collins might not have asked the question out loud, but she got her answer all the same. "UGH..." A voice rang out across the room. "DID YOU JUST SHIT YOURSELF? THAT'S FUCKING GROSS!"

## 2.

### Kelsey

Kelsey did not like being a baby. That much she knew. She found that she'd liked ball pits, and playgrounds, and kids' books, and comfy clothes, and stuffed animals just fine, and as a matter of function sippy cups made a lot of sense, but when you crossed that line into babyhood you could count her out.

Yeah, her parents were even more supportive and nurturing than Kelsey could remember, and the weird looks about liking those silly things had blinked out of existence, but the pendulum had swung too far in the wrong direction.

She couldn't go anywhere in public without an adult escort or supervision; with every adult determined to bar her path or limit her movement. She didn't mind holding her Daddy's hand, but as of yesterday it wasn't an affectionate request as much as it was a social expectation.

Speaking of her parents, no one who wasn't her age or close to it bothered to talk directly to her. Other Forbies talked to her, (or tried to; Kelsey was in no mood to converse with her peers after the incident with Dragon Jammies and Darling,) but the adults looked right through her so long as there was another grown-up to talk to. Complete strangers "complimented" her by talking about how cute she was to her parents instead of her.

It seemed every apparatus with her in mind, from chairs to beds to doors, was designed to limit her movement and stop her from escaping. Kelsey hadn't even been allowed to buckle herself into the car when she went back home with her parents. There had been a special harness waiting for her, which Mommy buckled her into while Daddy started up the car. Even worse, the devices worked flawlessly, as if she really were a baby.

Back in middle school she'd gone through a coin trick and sleight of hand phase after watching a Penn and Teller show on T.V. She'd been nothing special at it, but she could at least make a hanky disappear and pull it out of somebody's ear. As of last night, she couldn't get her hands to properly coordinate the grip and twist safety lock on her bedroom-turned-nursery's doorknob. Opening a bottle of Tylenol was beyond her right now.

She could still move her digits with perfect coordination if she imagined herself playing a piano; miming years of practiced chords and drills. Yet, her fingers got a case of the dumb when she'd tried to fiddle with the buckles on her shortalls.

That was another thing: Based on her current outfit, the shortalls she wore yesterday were the most adult thing she'd be wearing in the foreseeable future. Today she'd been dressed in (not dressed herself in) a short blue T-shirt that stopped just short of her belly button, a diaper (of course) and a waterproof plastic lined cover with Cinderella on the cover.

Under normal circumstances, Kelsey liked Cinderella. A lifetime ago (as late as a few days before), she'd been wearing Cinderella printed underwear, but this was too much. The plastic pants snapped into place along her hips instead of being pulled up. That meant that Kelsey had to endure the sensations of being diapered twice in a row.

Legs up. Bum up. Hear something sliding underneath. Bum down. Another layer of padding. Legs down. Spread 'em. Hold still. Snap up the left side. Snap up the right side. Ta-da! Sit up. Aaaand there's now two sets of crinkles; one from the plastic of the diaper, one from the plastic inside the cover.

Daddy referred to this ensemble as a "casual play outfit". Mommy said it was a "borderline stripper". Kelsey would have agreed, if not for all the extra material in the way of her private parts. She might as well have been stuffing a bum-bra. It was like weight training with her ass.

When she walked (if she could call it walking) she felt the extra weight yanking her down even more so than when she'd filled her pants up at the playhouse. And this was when she was dry downstairs. When the inevitable happened, how heavy would her hips feel?

It was inevitable, too, Kelsey had quickly learned. The psychology major had learned quickly through experimentation that unless she paid special focus to the task of holding her urine, she was just as likely to flood her diaper as keep it dry. Her bladder control had atrophied to near incontinence in a matter of hours. She well and truly needed diapers.

She couldn't even begin to dwell on the diapers, lest she break down into a sobbing fit. It wasn't just the incontinence aspect, either. Plenty of people were incontinent (plenty more since yesterday, Kelsey reckoned). Since reality had gone ca-ca, she had lost all rights to privacy and bodily autonomy. Strangers had groped her and manhandled her in the name of checking and maintaining her hygiene.

While getting her ready for bed, her mother rubbed a cold, smelly paste onto her buttocks, followed by perfumed cornstarch dusted onto her mound without so much as a warning, all in the name of keeping her from getting a rash.

So yeah...count her out of this whole "forever baby" thing. The cons far outnumbered and outweighed the pros.

If only she could be counted out. Being in her early twenties and in college, she never fully considered herself an adult, even if she was legally allowed to go out to a bar, get completely sloshed, and have unprotected sex with a total stranger (not that she ever did). She didn't even have that kind of reckless behavior now.

This morning alone, Kelsey had been stripped, wiped, diapered, effectively diapered again, dressed, carried, restrained in a chair, force fed what was effectively semi-liquid bread,

unrestrained, carried again, restrained in a DIFFERENT chair, transported to the old abandoned Bingo Hall (now a Forby daycare), unrestrained again, carried AGAIN, and then left with a bunch of other twenty-something toddlers who really ought to know better. Kelsey herself wasn't getting to DO anything. Everything was happening TO her.

"So this is life now," Kelsey mumbled as yet another daycare worker (too many grown-ups to keep track of) popped a disc into the big screen television's DVD player. "Might as well watch some cartoons." Walking towards the front, Kelsey's eyes scanned the room, looking for familiar faces.

No such luck.

No such curse.

Again, she was awash in a sea of strangers as parents brought in their adult/baby children. An adult that she didn't recognize- but certainly knew Kelsey's name- waved to her and asked if she'd already eaten breakfast.

The former college senior nodded and she was told to go sit on the carpet and watch the movie (In other words: What she was planning on doing anyways). Kelsey almost jumped out of her skin and screamed when the adult hurried her on her way with a light pat on her padded rear..

AGAIN with the casual space violations!

Was it this bad for real babies or did they just not mind as much?

A glance of other kids being sent off with playful swats told her it didn't matter. This is how it was for the time being. The other Forbies didn't have her sense of modesty or didn't know it should end and none of their parents had any expectations that they should grow to mind it. Little kids were only taught about stuff like "private parts" and "personal space" when they were considered competent enough to at least partly advocate for themselves and when sanitizing their genitals wasn't someone else's job.

"Play it cool, girl," Kelsey told herself. "Play it cool." The young woman unclenched her fists, and resorted to grabbing two handfuls of her wild, curly hair. Wearing almost nothing, she continued unnoticed among the infantile imbeciles and took a seat on the rug up close to the big screen T.V. as the first wave of previews ended.

It was little like that dream that a lot of people had: The one where they're at school or work, and either underdressed or completely naked, but no one else seemed to notice. Most psychologists that still put stock in such things, said that a naked dream was tied to feeling unprepared or vulnerable, even more so if the dream was set at a school or other childhood

setting. That was true in this case; Kelsey did indeed feel vulnerable, and the setting was certainly childish.

Speaking of which: Kelsey looked around and started counting bodies. First Forbies, then daycare workers. By the time the latest advertisement about what was coming out of the Disney Vault was done, Kelsey had a rough count. There were twenty-four giant babies, and six grown-ups. That was a one-to-four ratio; the exact recommended number of caregivers to toddlers recommended by the state curriculum guidelines according to her Sophomore year childhood development class. “Well I’ll be,” she said to herself.

“You’ll be what?” an unfamiliar voice caught the psych major’s attention. Kelsey pivoted in her seat and made eye contact with another young woman behind her.

The blonde girl sat there, legs splayed out, taking up as much space on her section of rug as possible. Her ample breasts were likely a benefit in the life before this one, but were worthless underneath her mint green onesie that had the leg gathers of her diaper poking out a bit at the edges. The blue pacifier dangling from the clip almost perfectly matched her intense, unblinking eyes. The pouting scowl on her lips looked like something damn near close to “adult”. Had they been seen as adults, the other girl would have been described as having “resting bitch face,” but under current circumstances would likely just be labeled “cranky”.

“You’ll be what?” the blonde forever baby asked again, her face a mask of seething anger. Bitch must have been constipated or something.

Kelsey might have answered her honestly, but fresh memories from yesterday’s antics of Dragon Jammies caused her not to trust big blonde babies. It’s not like she’d understand or appreciate how closely this second infancy was starting to mirror the first one. As far as everyone but her was concerned, this WAS their first infancy.

“I’ll be uh,” Kelsey did her best to manufacture a convincing lie. “I’ll be uh....uh...a unicorn.”

The woman in the green onesie rolled her crystal blue eyes like a mean girl from a high school flick. “Whatever,” she said dismissively before popping her pacifier between her lips. Kelsey directed her nastiest thoughts towards the spoiled brat of a woman and turned back to face the screen.

The main menu came up, and a teacher quickly pressed “play”, sending it to the main credits. “Pinocchio,” Kelsey said, smiling despite herself. “At least it’s a good one.” Kelsey had a special place in her heart for the more nostalgic aspects of childhood; hence her fascination with Dr. Seuss. Walt Disney’s second feature length animated film was no exception.

The petite little girl wiggled her fanny on the carpet a bit, trying to get herself more comfortable. Space was quickly running out of room as Forby after Forby came and laid down on the floor,

their faces propped up in their hands. Darn it. She should've laid down, too. Rookie mistake. On the bright side, she discovered, her diaper and cover had all the crinkle of being fresh and none of the telltale pulpiness of being wet. So she had that going for her...for the moment at least.

"You know this one, too?" A slender girl with her long black hair in braids tapped her on the shoulder. Kelsey turned her head to get a look at the newcomer. Relatively speaking, she was less babyish than the others. There was still the padded bump between her legs that they all shared in common, but she was wearing a black t-shirt and pink leggings; which made her look a sight far more adult than the boys and girls in their onesies and rompers, or Kelsey herself if she was being honest.

Kelsey took a deep breath, instinctively hoping against hope that she'd found a peer. "Yeah," she said, "as an adaptation it's very loose, but it establishes its own mythos and the Disney formula had yet to be codified yet, so any tropes it demonstrates could hardly be...blamed...upon...." The words were going right over the other girl's head, and the ex-psych student felt her enthusiasm waning. "Everybody oughta see...it...once." Only the childlike innocence and ignorance of a pre-kindergartener shone in the other woman's eyes.

"It's my second favoritest," the girl agreed. "I really like the songs and the cartoons."

Songs and cartoons. The goalposts were really close with this girl. "Uh-huh," Kelsey sighed. "Me too." Then she asked, "What's your favorite movie if this is your second favorite?"

The other girl grinned. "Alice in Wonderland. It's my favoritest cuz it has my name in it." A pause. "I'm Alice."

Kelsey's hand reached out in greeting. "Hi Alice, I'm Kel-"

"Shhhh...it's starting," Alice cut her off. "This is my favoritest part." Kelsey had the impression that every part of this movie was going to be Alice's "favoritest" part. Oh well.

At this point, a less whimsical soul might continue their spiral into existential crisis, devolving into further madness, or at least a temper tantrum. But Kelsey liked cartoons and songs too, even if she was more articulate about it than Alice. Awash in an impossible situation, Kelsey used the cartoon as a crutch, letting the songs and familiar story distract her from how bad everything had gotten.

"When you wish upon a star," she sang softly, dreamily, "makes no difference who you are, when you wish upon a star, your dreeeeeeeams coooooome truuuuue." Just let the dream take you, girl, she thought. Let the dream take you away. Numb the crazy.

"How are you doin' that?" an awestruck Alice asked in a hushed whisper. "That's amazing!"

It took a moment for Kelsey to realize that she was being talked to. She shook her head, sending her hair every which way. Giggles coincided with it, showing that at least some of the others were mildly amused. A muted growl, likely the bitch in the onesie indicated that at least one was not. “Whaddya mean?” she asked Alice, “Singin’?”

“No,” Alice shook her head, flapping her own braided hair across her face. “How do you know the words?”

The ex-psych major bit her bottom lip. It was a question that was too simple to answer easily. She decided to code switch into the local dialect. “I uh...have seen it a billion billion times...?”

“Me too,” Alice replied, “but I still don’t know all the songs. You must be super smart.”

Kelsey scoffed. Girl was impressed that she knew the lyrics to one of the easiest and most iconic songs in a musical that wasn’t particularly lyrically complex? Girl said this was her second favorite movie, and didn’t know the words to “When You Wish Upon a Star”? Then again, it’s not as if Alice, or any other forever baby, was a terribly reliable narrator.

Another snippet from her child development class bubbled up to the surface of her mind. It was possible that Alice was telling the truth. Toddlers often liked watching or doing the same activities again and again, because the repetition gave them time to analyze and lent a sense of predictability to their life, even if the act itself wasn’t properly memorized.

Yup. That was about on target with how Alice was acting, all things considered. “Naw,” Kelsey finally said as Geppetto finished his wishing prayer. “I’m just...developmentally advanced...for a Forby.”

“Huh?”

“Never mind,” Kelsey groaned softly and turned her head back to the movie. Time to ditch this nightmare world for a fantasy one. Time to tune out the voices of Freud and Piaget, and tune into Jiminy Cricket.

A sharp pain in her stomach and a building sensation of uncomfortable fullness ripped her out of the fantasy world by the time the Blue Fairy twinkled onto screen. “Not again,” Kelsey said a little too loudly.

“Shhhhhh” came the reprimand from a nearby adult. An older woman with red polished nails leaned over and whispered, “I know you’re restless, but you have to be patient. After everyone is done with breakfast, you can go to the playground before class if you want, but watch the movie for now. Okay hon?”

Kelsey had learned too quickly that arguing in her current state with someone over the age of thirty was futile. The poor thing just bit her lip and nodded, and was given a pat on the head for her trouble.

I'm gonna poop, Kelsey thought. I'm gonna shit myself. That's a fact. Don't know why, but it's a fact. I can't stop it. It's inevitable. She was trying to make peace with the idea. But if I try hard enough, maybe I can last until we go to the playground. Maybe I can have SOME form of autonomy.

Finding a corner outside to fill her pants in was the closest she'd get to excusing herself to go to the restroom.

Poop your pants at the playground, she thought as the pain started to build in her gut. Just make it till then. Poop your pants at the playground. You can do it. You can wait. You're a big girl. Big girls decide when they poop their pants.

"What's wrong?" A sympathetic Alice whispered, dragging Kelsey out of her bizarre medication.

"Gotta poop," Kelsey hissed, feeling a heat rise to her face. Another heat was filling up her diaper at the same time. In trying to control her bowels, she'd left her bladder unguarded. Fuck it. That's what diapers were for, anyways. She still hadn't lost.

Alice smirked. "Okay. So poop."

"Don't wanna," Kelsey growled. "I'mma big girl." She popped her thumb into her mouth and bit down on it to balance out the pain in her guts.

Alice's smirk widened. "Why's everybody sayin' that?" Lower cheeks clenched in defiance, Kelsey ignored what her new theatre companion just said. "Just poop. If you know you gotta go just get it over with." A dour expression flashed across the other girl's face. "It's not like you're gonna get to finish the movie anyway," she said, thumbing at the screen. "Some grown-up'll just drag you to a changing table or somethin'."

Like a ledge jumper looking for a way out, Kelsey desperately sought relief.

"They'll...change...me...?"

The less articulate girl looked absolutely incredulous...not that she knew what that meant.

"Course they will. That's what dumb grown-ups do. They change you even when you don't wanna get changed."

"But everybody's..." Kelsey stopped talking as another wave of cramps reared up...then continued, "...watchin'."



“So...?”

Kelsey couldn't argue with that logic. No one else seemed to mind when a guy or gal stopped and dropped a load in front of everyone. Some of the further gone ones even announced it.

According to philosopher Albert Camus, the solution to suffering in an absurd existence is to accept the absurdity and enjoy it. No matter how many times Sisyphus pushed that boulder up the hill, it would roll back down and he'd have to push it up all over again for all eternity. His suffering would never end if he continued to struggle against the boulder. Camus believed that the only way he could end his suffering would be to choose to take pleasure in the act.

As things were stacking up, Kelsey could not stop herself, or even properly delay the act of humiliating herself in public. The only way she could stop herself from despair would be to find some other way to feel about filling her diaper up.

In other words: Fuck it. When in Rome and all that. No need for modesty. Modesty was dead.

Internally, Kelsey focused on the pressure building up inside her body. How good it would feel to release it; to just let go and not care! She remembered the warmth that coated her as she did what came so naturally. And it was all contained, too. Nothing on the floor, nothing on her clothes (when she had to wear them), and nothing to be ashamed of.

The diaper around her hips contained the mess. It was efficient. It was clean. A few moments of pressure, then release and catharsis, and then she could be laid down and gently cleaned and renewed! Before then she might even take some pleasure in the little sensations and textures that encased her.

All she had to do was stop fighting herself internally, and be like Sisyphus: Enjoy her absurd, impossible, and endless task. Keeping her pants clean.

Yes, she thought. Let's do this. Let's enjoy pushing the boulder up the hill. Let's. Enjoy. Pushing.

Wild haired and wild eyed, Kelsey gathered her feet underneath her and stood to her full height. Eyes drooping closed, she took a deep breath, and with a kind of quiet dignity (all things considered), she ended her struggle.

Just like yesterday, the mess escaped into the back of her diaper, spreading out along her backside as she pushed more and more out of her. Unlike the previous incident, there was a kind of peace that settled over her as she did it. It was as if all of her anxieties were draining out into the thick padding and spreading harmlessly across her backside.

Eyelids fluttering and spots dancing in her vision, Kelsey mumbled something in tongues under her breath. Even she didn't know what she'd said, and in the heat of the moment, she didn't particularly care; it's not like anyone would have heard her anyway.

Just then, Kelsey was glad for the heavy plastic diaper cover; the thicker, stiffer material supported her messy diaper and made it sag and balloon less as she deposited her mess into her clothing. Discretion was key.

Damn, that felt good!

What happened next didn't.

“UGH...DID YOU JUST SHIT YOURSELF? THAT'S FUCKING GROSS!”

The words rang out like a gunshot. Shocked gasps and cries of “oooooooooh” echoed over the daycare floor. Bowlegged and messy bummed, Kelsey pivoted towards the source of the accusation.

Arms crossed, still scowling with a case of resting bitch face, and newly dropped pacifier now swinging from its tether, the blonde girl in the mint green onesie sat there while everyone else stared in disbelief.

“What?” the blonde witch asked the room of shocked onlookers. “It's gross. I'm right behind her, too, so it's like ground zero. If you gotta shit yourself,” she looked straight at Kelsey, “at least have a little dignity and try to do it in the corner. Be an adult about it.”

Emotionally laid low and stripped bare, the future psychologist saw her ideas moments ago as nothing but mental gymnastics meant to justify her actions. Those ideas were just reinforcing her own learned helplessness. They weren't meant to help; just to stencil on a smiley face onto an existential crisis.

Humiliated, Kelsey felt her own heart drop down into her diaper along with the rest of the mess her life had become. She looked around, trying to find some comprehending or sympathetic face. All eyes were on the mean blonde girl though, as if she had spoken some kind of arcane hex.

How could she be brought so low by some dumb blonde in a onesie? Even more astounding, had she just been saved from herself by a tactless peer calling a spade a spade?

Despite all of her education and her superb vocabulary, Kelsey was at a loss for words. Like every other Forby, she could only gaze, slack jawed at the young woman who'd so crassly shamed her in public.

It figured; in a world where self-defecation is the norm, it's cussing that gets all the attention. Only Alice didn't seem to notice what was going on, having stretched out onto her side and taking up both her own space and where Kelsey had been sitting. Alice kept watching the movie.

"DAKOTA!" a teacher yelled, breaking the spell. "THAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS NOT-"

"FUCK YOU!" This time it was Kelsey screaming the obscenities. "FUCK YOU, YOU STUPID JUDGEMENTAL CUNT! I BET YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE FUCKING SHALLOW SLUTS THAT PEAKED IN HIGH SCHOOL BEFORE WE-!" The pendulum had started swinging again. It had swung to full on pants filling toddler, and the immense injustice of her situation had caused Kelsey's emotional compass to right itself back in the direction of dignity, sophistication, analysis, and ultimately adulthood. Unfortunately, (or fortunately as the case may be perceived), that meant a quick side trip through the wild west of middle school, when pure brazen audacity and emotional intensity beat out social niceties and intellectual sparring.

It was extremely difficult (and ultimately futile in Kelsey's case) for someone to go through what Kelsey had endured and maintain their composure when even the small comfort of "everybody's doin' it" is taken away. So out the window composure went. Fuck it.

"KELSEY!" the teacher positively BOOMED. "THAT! IS! ENOUGH!"

Kelsey and the other girl stole a look at each other, two gladiators in a stunned silent coliseum. Great. Now they were both smiling.

As if sharing a thought, both babied women said the same thing to each other. "BI-!"

"TIIIIIME OUT!"

As two adults ran in and carried them away- one scooping her legs out from underneath her, the other one going for the blonde bimbo- Kelsey hoped that she was going to a changing table before going to a naughty stool. Even if not, worth it. Totally worth it.

By God, it felt glorious to actually DO something again, instead of having something HAPPEN to her. Cussing that bitch out had been the most adult thing she'd done all day.

### 3.

#### Dakota

Dakota started the day in a foul mood. In truth, she'd been in a foul mood since yesterday when her entire social standing had been reduced to "diaper wearing moron", but this morning it was particularly bad.

When she got home yesterday, she'd learned all too well that the difference between being waited on hand and foot and being treated like an idiot incapable of caring for herself was all a matter of the people tending to your needs. A cute boy with rich parents wanting to slip into her pants wasn't the same as her dad and younger sister. "Not having to" was much more fun than "not able to."

And there was so much that she wasn't able to do, despite her protests that lasted well into the evening. She couldn't dress herself, or feed herself, or bathe herself. Her hands seemed to go full on retard every time she tried to do something involving her own independence.

The lack of a bra and the soft, comfy clothes she'd been dressed in had a nasty one-two punch of giving her ample physical stimulation, but she couldn't so much as masturbate last night. Her fingers lacked the strength and coordination to rip the tapes off her diaper- she'd found out the hard way- and the Maggie Simpson sleep suit she'd been zipped into that night had been complete overkill.

Even AFTER she'd gotten over the sensation of a wet diaper (it actually felt kinda nice if she didn't think about it, she had to admit), she couldn't properly rub herself through two layers of fabric because of the damn baby monitor perched above her crib.

She'd bluffed Daddy into believing she had just had an itch- and that earned her an early change and another layer of cream and powder on her cootch- but when she'd been bold enough to try again and Virginia checked on her, she was punished.

"Nice try, baby sis," Virginia had cooed in the dark of her (of course) babified bedroom. "But that's just for us big girls." Then came the mittens. Then came the pacifier. Then came a long night of quietly moaning into the rubber gag while trying not to hump her mattress till unconsciousness claimed her.

Lack of sleep was decidedly a factor in her temperament.

This morning was no better, for her, unfortunately. The soft, mint green onesie clung to her curves, and air conditioning in the giant mental ward (this was NOT a daycare, fuck that) made her nipples as stiff as anything. Not that anyone noticed.

The shirt with crotch snaps only covered up as much as a bathing suit (more than her typical bathing suits, but still...) and no one gave her a second glance. Diapered or not, all the boys (and some of the girls likely) should have been drooling all over themselves.

They weren't though. A bulge in a boy's pants now just meant he needed to be changed, and she'd been among the first to be sat down at a long table, given a bowl of Cheerios to finger feed herself, and then be ushered towards a big screen T.V. with the other "Forbies". (What a stupid name).

Her body craved release, but she couldn't get the privacy (or intimacy) to allow herself to indulge. Instead, she had to settle for sucking on a pacifier and pretending she was sucking on something else. (God she never thought she'd miss Brendan this much this soon.) The sex-kitten had been declawed.

"Hey Dakota," a familiar (and unwelcome) voice called out to her. Now dressed in pink leggings and a black t-shirt, the little brat that had ruined Dakota's attempts to reclaim her dignity saddled up beside her on the carpet. "How ya doin'?"

If Dakota had given the other girl any more side eye, she'd be seeing the inside of her own skull. True to form, Alice was completely unfazed and played at misunderstanding. (At least Dakota thought it was playing...never could be too sure with a twat like Alice)

"Are you still mad about yesterday?" Alice asked. "Come on. I was just tryin' to stay outta trouble, same as you. No hard feelings."

Dakota snarled, "Oh there's hard feelings, alright."

"Oh no," Alice shot her hand up to her mouth. Her voice was dripping with concern. "Did you get spanked when you got home? I did and even my extra thicks make it hard to sit." She pointed to the extra big diaper she wore, the top poking out of her tights.

"Pfft..." Dakota said, "I'm used to having people beg to spank me. You," she leveled a finger at Alice, "humiliated me."

The dark haired ditz actually managed to cock an eyebrow. "How did I humiliate you?" Alice asked.

"You didn't see that public shaming?"

"You mean, 'time out'?" Alice asked, clearly unimpressed. "Time out is nothin'. I can do time out standing on my head."

“They were laughing at me!” Dakota hissed, digging her nails into her forearms in order to maintain some form of composure. “Everyone! Even the grown-ups!” (Dakota hadn’t meant to refer to the ones not pissing their pants as grown-ups...but the word fit.)

Alice shrugged. “If you say so. I ‘member one or two, but not everybody.” Was this basic bitch trying to gaslight her? “So,” she continued, “can I sit next to you?”

Dakota’s finely tuned instincts kicked into gear. When you were losing the game, change the game. “Sure.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Alice scooted up to Dakota, her braids clacking against each other as her enormous diaper rustled against the floor. Like a cat nipping at its owner’s heels so it could be fed, Dakota reached out and pinched Alice just above the elbow.

“Ow!” Alice exclaimed. She rubbed her arm. “What’d you do that for?”

Playing with her pacifier, turning it over in her hands, Dakota looked up and said “Did what for?”

“You just pinched me.”

“Did I?”

“I’m gonna tell,” Alice threatened.

Dakota stared her new rival dead in the eye. “Do it and see what happens.” The two stared each other in the eye, the DVD previews flashing on the screen just in front of them as more and more forever babies toddled in and took their places on the carpet next to, in front of, and behind them.

It was Alice who blinked first. Wordlessly, the other girl looked away, and scooted forward and off to the side; closer to the T.V. but with her back to Dakota and where Dakota could see her. As sure a sign of submission as any she was likely to get. “That’s right.” Dakota whispered to herself. “You move, you dumb cunt.”

“Well I’ll be,” a new voice wormed its way into Dakota’s ear. Dakota tensed up immediately. Had someone just seen what had happened? Now that the world had gone bonkers, it was back to literal playground politics. Snitches wouldn’t do.

Directly in front of her, all but blocking her view of the movie was this little tart with hair almost bigger than the rest of her body. The only thing she was wearing was a blue t-shirt and matching diaper cover with a Disney Princess on it. If Dakota was in a singlet, this chick was rocking a bikini. A tiny lifetime ago, Dakota might've seen that as a challenge, but the more merciful side of her reminded her that the dumb sap probably didn't know her colors, yet alone dress herself.

Still...couldn't be too careful. "You'll be what?" Dakota spoke up, trying to get this new competitor's attention. The girl turned around, eyes brimming with something resembling hope and then dimming to disappointment. Upon closer inspection of the girl's chest, Dakota deduced that this chick wouldn't have been competition.

Alice was already scooting closer to this new girl, (a potential sidekick or just another patsy? Did it matter?). Dakota locked eyes with her prey and repeated herself. "You'll be what?"

Eyes timidly darted around the other girl's skull. The idiot HAD heard something, after all, and like a cornered little rat, she was scrambling for an excuse. "I'll be uh...uh...a unicorn."

Unicorn? Really?

This chick couldn't have been that bright. Did she really expect Dakota to believe that tripe? Still, a lie meant she'd been cowed for the time being. Dakota rolled her eyes and let the idiot off the hook with a "Whatever," before popping her paci between her lips; sucking on it and thinking of Brendan. Big hair and tiny breasts turned away and looked back at the screen like a good little kicked puppy.

In front of her the screen finally got to the main menu and the feature presentation started. Great. Pinocchio. Dakota rolled her eyes yet again, feeling it was the only way of properly venting frustration left to her. At least it was a real movie and not Baby Einstein or whatever garbage kids were subjected to these days. She could deal with Disney before she could deal with more kiddie crap.

Alice and her latest patsy started jabbering, not that Dakota minded terribly. She couldn't hear what they were talking about, and only saw their chins wagging. But just knowing that Alice wasn't in tears was enough to make her skin crawl. Dakota promised to concoct an appropriate level of torment and revenge for Alice...right after the movie.

The ex-gold digger cocked her head to the left. Then to the right. Damn it. Unicorn bitch kept fidgeting in her seat and shaking her head when she talked. Her hair was like a friggin' flag and kept flapping every which way, blocking her view. Losing patience, she curled her lip and let out a low warning growl, knowing that the lesser woman would hear it.

That seemed to settle her down a bit; even if she was still whispering junk to Alice.

The movie hadn't been on ten minutes when the new girl crossed the line from minor nuisance to major problem. It all happened so fast. The new girl gathered her feet up underneath her and stood up, completely blocking Dakota's view of the Blue Fairy.

She didn't stay at her full height long, though. Almost as soon as she stood up, she widened her stance, and squatted down, her well padded rump jutting out behind her...right where Dakota was sitting.

Oh no. Dakota's eyes widened in fear, and she felt herself biting down on her pacifier.

New girl started grunting, and decidedly rude, unladylike noises started sneaking out from her backside.

Oh God, please no.

"POOOOOPIE!" the girl announced to everyone within earshot, as her own backside trumpeted the arrival of a load in her pants, the back end noticeably bulging even with the extra layer of "protection" that the girl had on. And front and center, there for the whole show, was Dakota. The blonde sex-kitten could only watch, unable to properly react as the disgusting little freak slacked a bit and sighed audibly while she wiggled her backside like a tail, spreading the stink of her own loaded diaper around the room. The girl's knees were starting to buckle, like she was about to sit right back down like nothing had happened.

Oh hell no!

There might not have been a way to properly react, but Dakota decided to act.

"UGH...DID YOU JUST SHIT YOURSELF?" she called out. "THAT'S FUCKING GROSS!"

Her righteous words seemed to snap the little twat out of her hypnotic crap trance, causing the girl to stand ramrod still. Like a group of school children who'd just witnessed the cardinal sin of cussing in a classroom, the other dumb babies audibly sucked in their breaths and cries of "ooooooh" washed over her.

Inwardly, Dakota smiled to herself. She was exactly where she wanted to be now. In control and at the center of attention. If she was gonna be stuck as a giant toddler, she'd at least be the Queen Bitch Toddler.

Bowlegged and dumb, the girl who'd just shit herself and announced it to everyone turned around, blushing furiously and giving Dakota a pathetic death glare. As if it was Dakota's fault



this idiot had just acted the fool. For some people, this whole diaper thing was surely a needed improvement.

“What?” Dakota addressed the crowd. “It’s gross. I’m right behind her, too, so it’s like ground zero. If you gotta shit yourself,” she pointed to her latest victim, “at least have a little dignity and try to do it in the corner. Be an adult about it.” She hadn’t slapped the girl, but to Dakota’s thinking, and based on the reaction, she might as well have.

Meanwhile, predictably, Alice had just laid down where the new girl had been sitting and was still watching Pinocchio. Girl was a real sociopath and a true eye of the storm. She stirred shit like a pro, but was never there for the blowback. Dakota kind of admired that. Shame she couldn’t be friends with her.

“DAKOTA!” an orderly (or whatever you called someone who got paid to wipe adult asses) called out. Dakota was already preparing a heartfelt apology to the adult and little miss poopy pants. The ‘dumb baby’ card could be played to her advantage. “THAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS NOT-“

“FUCK YOU!” The orderly was cut off, but not by Dakota. The ex-man eater actually jumped a little bit. It was the new girl. Dakota didn’t even think these forever babies knew how to swear anymore.

”FUCK YOU, YOU STUPID JUDGEMENTAL CUNT!” The new girl piled on. “I BET YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE FUCKING SHALLOW SLUTS THAT PEAKED IN HIGH SCHOOL BEFORE WE-!”

Another grown up cut the other diapered woman off. “KELSEY! THAT! IS! ENOUGH!” Kelsey, huh? Dakota made a mental note to remember that name, so she’d know who to mentally pick apart over the coming days. (How else was she supposed to keep her sanity?)

Dakota had known girls just like this. Jealous, ugly girls, who weren’t good looking or charming enough to get by on their own. The ones who were the Mathletes and the Spelling Bee Champs who swore they’d go on to “own” girls like Dakota, but really just ended up marrying some other obscure loser.

Dakota looked in the other girl, and saw a fire in her eyes. This chick really wanted a fight it seemed. Good. Let’s fight.

As if sharing a thought, both babied women said the same thing to each other. “BI-!”

“TIIIIIME OUT!”

Like a kiddie version of a prison riot, two fully functional (relatively speaking...they worked here) adults ran in and separated one scooping her legs out from underneath this Kayla girl (or whatever her name was), her diaper already starting to sag despite the extra layer on her ass, and the other one rudely yanking Dakota out of the T.V. area and towards a corner cordoned off with painter's tape, a sign made out of construction paper and permanent marker labeling the area "Time Out."

Worth it. Totally worth it.

A tiny little plastic stool, not that different from the one at Mrs. Jay's house yesterday was yanked out, and Dakota was forced to sit down on it. "Now, you just sit there and think about what you've done," the orderly said.

Gladly. Dakota popped her paci and started sucking on it contentedly as the rube walked away. While she was an island of calm on the outside, Dakota's heart was pounding with excitement. A real catfight was looming; Dakota could feel it. Girl was so angry she was close to swinging, Dakota knew. That'd be all the excuse she'd need to wreck some face. It'd been years since she'd gotten to do this, but starting a fight was like riding a bike.

She held onto that anger. She sipped at it like a fine pinot noir. She nursed it like the milk in one of the bottles she'd be undoubtedly force fed at some point today. She didn't understand why the world had changed around her, or why she was the only one that noticed it, but right now she didn't care.

Conflict. That's what would keep her going. That's what would keep her from cracking. That's what would keep her sane.

As she stewed in her anger, Dakota's concentration was broken when another big baby entered her sight from the periphery. Like everyone her age since yesterday, the girl waddled as much as she walked from all the swollen thirsty padding strapped between her thighs. The big polka-dot bow and matching dress made the wobbling more apparent, with the hem and edges of the ribbons swaying and bobbing left and right with every step. It'd been kind of funny if it weren't so sad.

Despite herself, Dakota sucked harder on her paci. She was having flashbacks from the previous day. Soon, she feared, more big dumb diapered idiots would come up and start pointing and laughing her. Soon, she'd be out of control.

No more Forbies came with her though. No one else came at all, unless you counted the stuffed rabbit that the girl clung to like it was her lifeline. For a tiny eternity, the two women stared at each other.

"Whaddy want?" Dakota asked, mumbling behind her binkie.

The chick in the Minnie Mouse getup cleared her throat. "I'm Susan," the new girl said. "I wasn't a big baby until yesterday. None of us were."

Dakota spat out her pacifier, indignantly. "I know that!"

"Yeah, but that puts us in the minority, doesn't it?"

The ex-gold digger stopped the rubber nipple swinging on her neck. "Fair point."

"Thing is," this other lady, Susan, said "I think that other girl is in the same boat."

"You think so?" Dakota asked.

"Yeah, I do."

Come to think of it, maybe the chick with the stuffed bunny was right. Didn't her new enemy mention something about high school? How would she even know to use those same old useless arguments unless she remembered them? You didn't bring up high school to a baby (or a retard, for that matter). It just wasn't done.

That meant that Dakota wasn't really alone in this madhouse. There were others.

"Hmm..." Dakota allowed herself to smile. "...maybe we should all be friends, then."

## **CHAPTER 5**

*There's limitations to magic, however, dear friends. That limit? Ourselves. This isn't meant in a motivational sense such as "the only thing we need to fear is fear itself". Magic itself is fundamentally unlimited power, but because humanity has reached a stage in its preternatural awareness so that magic can be harnessed, the substance itself has become flawed.*

*Take the Greek Gods of ancient myth, for example. Humanity's collective belief in them made them come into existence (some might say). Where did they live and look down on the Greeks? The top of a mountain, of course. Why not just in the sky? Why not in an ethereal alternate dimension where they could simultaneously peek down on us mere mortals but have it to where we could not access them by climbing up a big rock?*

*Because collectively the Greeks couldn't imagine such things. They could imagine bearded men hurling lightning bolts from the clouds, but not alternate planes of existence. They knew that lightning came from the sky, and their belief was strong enough to make real a Zeus to hurl them from on high, but because it was a man hurling those bolts, he'd have to live somewhere high as well, like a mountain.*

*Man is unable to fully imagine unlimited power. Clever apes that we are, we are still bound by our own limitations, imaginations, knowledges, and lack thereof. Man was not meant to fly, so we craft ourselves glorious waxen wings on which to fly upon. Yet the sun melts wax, and it is with that realization in mind that we plummet down to the waves below, having flown too close to the sun. Our existence is one of limitations. We as a species define ourselves based on what we can't do, rather than what we can. Even with magic to broaden the limitations, the limitations can never be fully removed.*

*Even someone with the purity of belief and willpower of a child knows of limitations, and in overcoming them with magic to bend the rules, the existence of other rules become set in stone.*

- *An excerpt from "Do You Believe in Magic?" by Cornelius Crowley.*

### **1.**

#### **Dakota**

Arms crossed over her chest, leaning against the rusty ladder of the rickety slide, Dakota stared at her two new (for now) friends. The movie had finished, time out sentences had been served, diapers had been checked and changed where needed, and truces had been called. Pinocchio ended without incident, from the handful of sane women at least; more than few forever babies started bawling when it looked like the little wooden boy had died at the end. It was currently outdoor playtime. Now it was a time for proper introductions and to figure out exactly how they had gone from being young adults on the cusp of bigger and better things to perpetual toddlers, destined only for the cradle. But where to do it where they wouldn't be bothered?

Like a flock of ducklings, they'd waddled from place to place on the playground, seemingly as easily distracted as any of the other forever babies wandering from swings, to teeter totters, to jungle gym. The swings were all strap-in restraints with particularly bothersome adults who busied themselves pushing the Forbies happily entrapped in them. A spot for two people in a three person group wouldn't do, so the teeter totters wouldn't work. The jungle gym was far too populated, and it went without saying that they didn't want to be overheard by a "grown-up" or another "forever baby".

The sandbox was out of the question, they all agreed. Even if it would be an area where they could speak without too much meddling, the thought of sand (and OTHER things) getting into their clothes was a major turn off. The spider-web dome only provided the illusion of privacy, and no amount of hunkering down would scatter the other big toddlers from climbing above them. (And the thought of a diaper leaking overhead gave them all chills...it did for Dakota at least.)

A rusty and unoccupied slide is where they finally settled upon for their secret cabal. Unoccupied, relatively unsupervised, (barring some slaggy middle-aged daycare worker waving to them every once in a while...easily appeased by a wave back), and fairly secluded off to the periphery of the playground, it was as close to adequate as the three of them could hope for.

Before they could begin talking, Dakota held up her index finger and cast her eyes on a certain little snitch with braided black hair making a beeline for them. Alice had already started to toddle up, the bulge in her leggings looking like a pelvic tumor. That cunt was a troublemaker.

The blonde bitch (and proud of it) promised herself that if there was paint in this place, that Alice's hair would be coated with it by the end of the day. Time to nip this complication in the bud. A serpentine smirk and a lioness's stare from Dakota sent the little brat back the way she came. No matter the age, or social status, Dakota's "bitch, please" face had a kind of universal effect when needed.

Susie (or Suzanne, or whatever her name was) looked back over her shoulder where even now Alice was slinking away to the giant spring rockers, then back to Dakota, and cocked an eyebrow. "Was that really necessary?" she asked. If it hadn't been for the stuffed bunny that she was clutching to her chest, Dakota might've been able to take the other girl seriously...maybe.

"Probaby," Dakota said, with a shrug. "Dat chick's a professnul shit shtirrer. Trusht me."

"Says the shit stirrer," the third member of their little group chirped in. The little bird with the curly hair had gotten awfully mouthy, even after hiding behind her own hands as a stranger wiped her ass for her. Truth be told, Dakota probably wouldn't have handled the situation any better. She'd yet to have anyone who wasn't a blood relative do THAT to her- a lesser evil placebo to be sure, but one that made her feel less violated and more in control than she was.

Odds were a hundred to one that she'd make it through the day without some rando dragging a cold wet rag across her cooter, and she really ought not to judge before she'd walked a mile in someone else's shoes, the tiny part of her conscience told her.

Still...

Time to establish a pecking order, Dakota thought. "Shays the one who shit her pants and towd ush 'bout it." At least all of Dakota's bathroom degradations over the past twenty-four hours had been subtle and (relatively) private.

"I'd respect your opinion of me a lot more if you weren't sucking on that binkie right now," Curly Top said. Dakota looked down past her nose. Only then did she notice that the rubber bulb had made it back between her lips. When had that gotten there?!

With an audible, almost comical "ptooey", Dakota spit out the pacifier. It didn't get far, constrained as it was by the clip attaching it to her mint green onesie, but it was far enough for her purposes. Dakota decided it was anger more than embarrassment that caused her skin to turn slightly pink, giving her a bizarre pastel Christmas look: pink blushing skin on green baby outfit. "Fair enough," she said, almost growling to the little bird. Deep breath. Deep breath. "Fair enough...uhh..name?".

"Kelsey," the girl answered. "My name's Kelsey."

"Dakota," she introduced herself, properly. Neither one extended their hand.

"Susan," the girl with the bunny said. (Close! So close. She looked more like a Susie anyways, so it still counted.)

They stared at each other in silence, for a moment. How did one start a conversation like this, anyways? It's not like there was a precedent for this sort of thing.

"So," Dakota started. "You guys remember a time when you weren't freaks?" Kelsey turned her back to Dakota and wrapped her arms around herself.

"Yeah...kinda..."

"We're not freaks," Susie said. "We're just-"

"Don't you dare say 'forever babies'" Dakota cut her off, "or any of that other schlock that every other dumbass here is spouting."

"I was going to say, 'in a messed up situation'," Susie finished. "I don't think any of us would've been on a giant playground willingly a few days ago."

Twitching her mouth to the side, Dakota said, "Yeah, this isn't exactly my scene."

“Mine either,” Susie said. The two women looked to Kelsey. The girl in the plastic pants turned around and fleetingly made eye contact.

“...yeah.”

The former queen bee saw the look in the little bird’s eyes, or more importantly saw how they twitched downward towards the ground. She’d seen that reaction before back in the halcyon days of high school, usually when gossiping about the latest loser to get knocked up and how they would have to either get an abortion or drop out.

Target acquired. Testing for vulnerability. Dakota narrowed her eyes at Kelsey. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” Kelsey repeated. “Only weirdos are into this kid stuff. I wouldn’t be caught dead here if my parents hadn’t dragged me here.” The curly headed girl said all of this over her shoulder, as if Dakota’s very stare caused her discomfort.

Dakota had never been much for reading, but back in high school, she’d been forced to sit through a torturously boring read through of Hamlet. Awful stuff. So boring. Ghost daddy comes back and says he was murdered, Hamlet spends way too much time trying to figure out what to do, and then dies.

Had Dakota written it, the play would have been a lot shorter and to the point: Ghost Daddy. Murder. Revenge murder. The End. There wouldn’t be half a dozen acts of padding. (Shit! Don’t even THINK padding!) But one part had stuck with her even after high school: ‘The lady doth protest too much, methinks.’ People tended to make a bigger deal out of stuff they were guilty of.

(Ready, aim) “Really?” Dakota said, voice full of mock surprise. (Fire.) “Because you looked pretty comfortable up front watching the movie and filling your panties in front of every-“

“SKANK!”

That escalated quickly. A sore spot had been hit. She’d ben right. Girl was a freak (before the rest of them had been, anyway).

Reacting on pure instinct Dakota put her hands up to block incoming cat claws, the smaller woman going for her eyes. In a blur, Susie was between them, shoving the smaller girl back and getting her hair bow mused in the process.

“HUGS!” Susie screamed at the top of her lungs. “HUGS!” A profound list of expletives was about to erupt from Dakota’s mouth followed by some very physical retaliation, when she saw that one of the grown-ups was looking at them. “HUGS!”

With no alternative left to her, Dakota followed suit, engaging in what had to be the most intense and awkward cuddle yet known to her. Granted, it wasn’t the first time she pretended to like

someone she couldn't stand while authority figures were watching, but a group hug was a new personal low. "HUGS!"

Kelsey was still twitching, still struggling. "We're being watched," Dakota whispered, "chill the fuck out."

"Say you're sorry," Kelsey growled back, her voice surprisingly full of menace. "Say you're sorry or I rip your effin' hair out."

"Do it," Susie hissed. "Say you're sorry."

Eyes shut, and fingers crossed (mentally at least) Dakota huffed out, "Fine. I'm sorry. I didn't know it'd hurt your feelings." (Well, not that much, anyway.) The tension in the three-way grapple left as Kelsey eased up, her muscles relaxing, no longer going for the throat.

"Break on three," Susie instructed. "One."

"Two," Kelsey said.

"Three!" they all said in unison.

They all broke apart, and still huffing and puffing from the adrenaline, put on big toothy grins. The daycare worker who'd made her way towards the group stopped her approach and went back to her position watching forbies from a bench against the daycare wall. Smoothing her polka dot dress, Susie turned to Kelsey. "This fighting stops now."

"She started it!" Kelsey whined like the child she was dressed as.

"And I'm stopping it," Susie said flatly. "As far as we know, we're the only three who remembers how the world is really supposed to be. It's some kind of miracle that we found each other. We can't go pushing our luck and fighting all the time."

Dakota couldn't help but smirk. It was good to be her. Sometimes even when she lost, she won.

The prissy little geek whirled around and leveled her finger inches away from Dakota's nose. "And you're going to stop provoking her," she said.

"Who made you in charge?" Dakota scoffed.

Rather than answer directly, Susie did a kind of verbal parry. "You keep it up, and we'll leave you. You can be super judgmental and bratty by yourself."

"You'd leave me?" Dakota asked, aghast. "For her?"



“Uh-huh,” Susie- no, Susan...her name was Susan- said matter-of-factly. She pointed a thumb back over to Kelsey. “I like her better than you.”

Absolutely dumb struck, Dakota just stood there. Before yesterday she'd always been the popular girl. No one said 'no' to her. She ditched others. Nobody ditched her. The notion was inconceivable. The other girl might as well have told her that they had all grown gills and were breathing water at this very instant.

“Basic supply and demand,” Susan went on. “People who don't think we should be in diapers are rare. Unless you want to go play with the babies or be by yourself, you play by my rules. Got it?”

Rules? Dakota could use rules. Social expectations were her forte. Time for a verbal parry of her own. “What rules?” The other two girls looked at each other; dumbfounded. They hadn't thought of that. “How can I follow your rules if I don't know them?”

Susan- nah, she was definitely a Susie- hemmed and hawed for a moment before Kelsey spoke up. “No more picking on me,” she said.

“No more fighting with each other,” Susie added. “We don't have to like each other, but we can at least be civil.”

“Fair enough,” Dakota agreed. “But we call each other out when we're acting like ba-” Dakota stopped herself and course corrected mid-sentence. “children...when we're acting like children. We want to be treated like adults, right?”

Kelsey's nose wrinkled with a scowl. It was cute, honestly. “You were the one sucking on a binkie a second ago.”

Dakota shrugged. “And you called me on it, so I stopped it.” Then she waited a beat for effect and added, “Thanks.”

Susie asked, “You do realize you're twiddling with it right now, right?”

She had not realized that. Dakota looked down and saw her hands turning the paci over and over in them, inching closer and closer to her lips. With considerable willpower and more than a hint of embarrassment, she put her hands behind her back, letting the rubber teat dangle on its cord. “Thanks...” she said sincerely this time.

“Why don't you just rip that thing off?” Kelsey asked, pointing to the pacifier.

“Why don’t you rip those plastic pants off?” Dakota countered. “Dressing myself hasn’t exactly been in my skill set lately. My hands go numb, or my mind goes blank or something. There’s a block.”

Susie seemed agreeable to the idea. “I think we ARE being affected by whatever magic is doing this. It’s just slower than everybody else for some reason.”

Even though her underwear yesterday had turned plastic-backed right in front of her as she pissed herself, Dakota couldn’t help but feel silly talking in terms of the mystical.

“Magic?”

“Do you have a better word for it?” Kelsey chirped in.

Dakota was about to levy a quip, but she stopped herself. Nothing to gain from being a smart ass this time. “I guess not,” she admitted. “What other rules?”

“No dirty diapers,” Kelsey brought up.

Instead of laughing at the idea, given the source of it, Dakota let her confusion show.

“Come again?”

“No dirty diapers.”

“I don’t know about you,” Susie spoke up (bullshit, she totally knew), but I haven’t had the best track record of that lately. Just thinking about it caused her two rose colored circles to bloom on her cheeks right underneath her glasses.

Kelsey blinked and licked her lips, as if choosing her words very carefully. “I mean, no talking about stuff without clean diapers on. If it happens, it happens, but then we go get changed. It’ll be like a bathroom trip.”

Susie saved Dakota the trouble of asking. “Why?”

“Babies might spend their time playing in wet and poopy diapers, but we shouldn’t.”

Remembering how much time she’d spent in her own sopping wet pampers at Brendan’s birthday party, with nary a cry of discomfort, Dakota blanched. She really had been perfectly comfortable walking around and ‘playing’ in a wet diaper. Basting in her own shit had merely been inconvenient when just a day or so ago, the idea would be near vomit inducing.

“Something the matter?” Kelsey asked, a hint of smugness in her voice. She’d just hit one of Dakota’s sore spots and she knew it, too. (Damn it. Even playing field.) The queen bee had protested too much.

Shaking her head, Dakota just said “No. You’re right. Good point. Bathroom breaks. Deal.”

“No shame,” Susie said. “We’ve gotta help each other, not tear each other down.” A warning look was fired at both Dakota and Kelsey. “We’ve gotta figure out what’s wrong with us, what’s causing it, and maybe we can figure out where to go from there.”

“And keep each other from going crazy,” Dakota added. “Between high chairs and car seats and cribs, I’m already starting to feel claustrophobic.” Sympathetic and knowing nods greeted Dakota’s eyes.

“Strollers too,” Susie added.

Kelsey threw her two cents in. “And changing tables. We’re basically not trusted to have any freedom of movement.”

“It’s like those porn videos with the leather and rope, except there’s not any of the fun stuff.” Dakota said. Her two companions looked at each other; seemed to consider a moment, then shrugged and nodded. “What’s worse though,” the queen bee vented on, “is how stupid everybody is.”

A thoughtful, yet worried look flashed across Kelsey’s face. Little bird was thinking something. “Stupid how?”

“Maybe not stupid,” Dakota said, taking a moment to sort her thoughts out. She looked back and saw Alice, remembering their bathroom chat yesterday. “More like...I dunno...brainwashed? It’s like they operate on some backwards baby logic or something.”

Susie clutched her stuffed bunny even tighter. If the dumb thing had actual lungs, they’d be collapsed right now. “Had a talk with my Mommy yesterday about that. Something doesn’t add up. It’s like everyone wants to be babies.” Briefly, Dakota wondered if this new girl in the cutesy toddler dress normally referred to her mom as Mommy, or not.

“Ohmygodyes,” Kelsey echoed the sentiment with some excitement. “It’s Peter Pan syndrome taken up to eleven.”

“Real talk,” Dakota admitted, “I’m happy we’re doing this. Just sitting around and bitching,” she gestured to Kelsey, “even insulting someone and getting into an actual physical fight and cussed at instead of tears and running to tattletale...it’s kinda a relief. If all I had was this romper room stuff to deal with, I think I’d go batshi-...” Dakota stopped mid-sentence.

The surge through her gut hit her like a jackhammer. The cramp came without warning or preamble, and within a second Dakota was moaning under her breath. Soft moaning mutated

into louder grunts as she bent her knees a bit, halfway registering what she was about to do and halfway acting on a kind of instinct. She either lacked control, or part of her didn't want any.

When the first push came, her lips puckered and her teeth grit. When the second one came and she felt her cheeks spreading, she fumbled for her pacifier. On the third one her lips had started working the pacifier rapidly and noisily, and it was like a circuit had been completed.

Suck. Mewl. Grunt. Push. Suck. Mewl. Grunt. Push. All the while, the back of Dakota's diaper became fuller and fuller, while the rest of the world went away. Just keep pushing. Let it all out. Let it go. The diaper didn't sag as much, the onesie holding it up against her as she continued to poop, feeling the mess spread around with every grunt, her disgust increasing, but drowned out by the massive amount of relief she was experiencing at the same time.

In the back of her mind, a little voice that sounded deceptively like her own told her: 'C'mon. It's just poopie. Finish poopin', and you can go back to talkin' with your friends. Heck, keep talkin' with them while you poop. You can do both. They won't mind.'

They wouldn't mind, would they? They'd done it themselves. It was no big deal. To help herself, she spread her legs a bit more and squatted down, a dopey grin spreading across her face. It just felt so much more natural to her all of a sudden; like this was how she was meant to do it. It was coming out! She could do it! She could do it! No need to hold back! No need for shame! Just! A little! Mooooooooore!

A long low moan, not unlike when she orgasmed (or when she was faking it) rattled around in her throat as the last of the soil filled the back of her diaper, a kind of ecstatic emptiness taking root in the pleasure centers of her brain. All done. Empty, but in a good way. Empty on the inside. Warm and mushy on the outside. So good.

A split second later, her vision unfogged, and fully came back to herself, her face broken out into a cold sweat and the tremendous load in the back of her panties was being held close to her once smooth silky skin. Taking in the only two women she could even consider peers, she saw the looks on their faces. Susie was sympathetic, but distinctly uncomfortable. Kelsey had a mixture of schadenfreude and mortification. Dakota remembered how absolutely zonked out and out of her own head Kelsey had looked during the movie. Is that how Dakota had looked just now?

"Bafwoom breaks, yeah?" Dakota asked, cringing all the while. Why was she talking so funny? She remembered the pacifier between her lips and spit it out yet again. "Be right back," she said more clearly. As fast as she could, Dakota started waddling to the nearest grown-up, trying not to cry.

## 2.

### Kelsey

Kelsey colored the duck blue. The so-called “rules session” they’d been working on had kind of fell flat after Dakota had pooped herself in front of everyone. Shared embarrassment, revulsion, and Kelsey’s own particular brand of “not so funny when it happens to you, is it?” schadenfreude kind of shut down any form of parliamentary procedure or critical thinking for the time being.

After a quick review, all of their rules boiled down to “don’t try to hurt each other”, “act as adult as possible”, and “try to help each other act like an adult”, anyways. Kelsey supposed those were the three most important rules anyways. And so the three of them had filled in the remaining playground time by swapping background stories.

They were all locals. All went to different high schools. Susan- or maybe it was Susie, Kelsey was having the darndest time keeping that part straight for some reason-and Kelsey had both gone to the same college, but if they’d ever crossed paths, it wasn’t remarkable enough for either of them to remember. Unsurprisingly, Dakota hadn’t gone past high school and had spent the last few years “doing odd jobs” while “looking for ‘the one’”. It took everything for Kelsey not to cough ‘slut’, but rule number one was that there was a ceasefire in effect. Something about that bitch in the onesie brought out the worst in Kelsey.

Now, they’d all been moved inside, out of the heat of the day, and kept themselves busy at a table filled with coloring books and crayons.

She wasn’t allowed to attack Dakota, they were no closer to figuring out how they all ended up as perpetual two-year-olds (at best), and boredom was starting to set in. With boredom came discomfort, and irritation, and that would lead to hostility. So for now, she colored the duck blue.

“Shouldn’t that be a different color?” It was a Dakota, of course. Both of the other women rested their hands on their chins. “Ducks aren’t really that color.” Still spreading the blue around on the duck’s paper feathers, Kelsey looked up at Dakota. She had her chin in her hands, her eyes half closed, like a cat eyeing a mouse but too lazy to pounce. The hair on the back of the ex-psych major’s neck stood on edge. Dakota had put in that rule about “calling each other out,” so she’d have a safe way to bring everyone down, Kelsey knew; even if it was a good rule. “That’s true,” Kelsey said looking her new nemesis in the eye, “but I’m mostly doing this for the kinesthetic stimulation.”

“Hmmm?” Susan intoned, her eyes coming a bit more alive at the sound of more advanced vocabulary coming from a peer’s mouth.

Still coloring the duck blue, Kelsey said in her most clinical voice, "I enjoy the act of moving the crayon around the paper. I'm not trying to make art, realistic or otherwise. I'm fidgeting." Without changing her tone she looked to Dakota. "Is that grown-up enough?"

The bitch in the green onesie bit her lip and nodded, reluctantly. "Yeah. That's fair." Then she conceded, "There's stuff like adult coloring books, too, so I guess coloring isn't THAT childish." Neither one would admit it, but Kelsey had the distinct feeling that they were starting to respect each other, if not like one another.

"Back to our problem?" Susan asked. "How did we get this way?"

Dakota scoffed. "What does it matter how we got like this? What's important is how can we get back to the way things used to be."

The girl with the glasses explained, "Maybe if we figure out how this happened, we can figure out how to undo it."

"You find a guy with broken legs," Dakota said, turning her entire body to face Susan, "who cares if he got in a car accident, or a tree fell on him? You don't unbreak them by picking the tree back up or putting the car in reverse."

"Now you're just being contrarian," Kelsey said.

The blonde bitch grumbled something that might have been "Alright..." and then turned away from Susan.

A moment or two passed and Susan started again. "What was the last thing you were doing before you ended up like this?"

"You think everyone was doing something that made us into giant babies?" Kelsey asked. "That seems unlikely."

Susan adjusted her glasses and smoothed out her dress. "Maybe not. But I'm betting there's a reason why we're the only three who remember—"

"As far as we know," Dakota interjected. "Could be more."

"Contrarian," Kelsey said. Dakota shut up and moved for her pacifier. A sideways glance from the other two stopped her.

Dakota rolled her eyes and huffed. "You wanna know what I was doing before my potty training went away?" she asked, rhetorically. "I was giving my boyfriend a blowjob so that he wouldn't

feel bad I turned his marriage proposal down...in front of his family...at his birthday party.” The other two stared in stunned silence. “What?” she smirked. “Too much information?”

Susan took off her glasses and set them on the table. Leaning back in the little plastic chair, she closed her eyes and rubbed her temples. “Wow,” she said. “You’re a terrible person.” The tone was more clinical than irritated, though there was a clear note of exasperation. “That has got to be one of the most disgusting things I’ve heard.”

“Don’t be a prude, Susie” Dakota said, clearly enjoying the attention.

“It’s Susan. Not Susie.”

The former psych-major spoke up, lest the topic derail even more. “It’s not the B.J,” Kelsey said. “It’s that you just so casually admitted to using sex to manipulate someone.”

If Dakota was embarrassed by this, it didn’t show. “It was complicated. He surprised me with the proposal. I didn’t want to marry him. But I didn’t want to ruin the party or break off the relationship.”

“I didn’t want to think that this might be some kind of cosmic punishment,” Susan said, slipping her glasses back on and nervously bouncing her stuffed bunny on her knee. “But I’d say that’s a definite maybe that this is some kind of ironic twist.”

Something about that bothered Kelsey. “But Susie-“

“Susan”

“-Susan, that would mean we deserved this as some kind of punishment, too.” She gestured to Dakota, “Like, thematically I get how turning a...a...gold digger- no offense-“

“None taken.”

“-into basically a sexless toddler could be seen as some kind of punishment, but what were we doing that got us like this?” A beat passed and Kelsey couldn’t help but ask the first question that flashed across her brain. “Were you having sex, too?”

Susan shook her head, and Kelsey immediately felt a wave of relief wash over her. If the linking theme between them was ‘sex’ that’d either mean she was the odd woman out, or that she had some VERY complicated feelings about Dr. Seuss.

“I was having an argument with my Mommy,” Susan said. “I didn’t want to take over the family business. Then she told me that I was acting like a little kid...and then this happened.”

Dakota had grabbed a coloring book and was flipping through it like it was a fashion magazine; not so much examining the pictures of cartoon animals as briefly registering they were there before flipping to the next one. "So you were in a fight about growing up with your Mom," Dakota said. "What about you, Kelsey?"

Kelsey flushed hot. What if this was somehow her fault? Should she lie? No. Proper conclusions couldn't be reached if the data was faulty. "I was memorizing Fox in Socks," she admitted. Now it was her turn to be stared at. More context. Quick. "It was for a fluff class," she explained. "I had to recite poetry." That ought to be enough to satisfy their curiosity.

"Still," it was Susan, not Dakota, that spoke up. "Isn't it kind of weird that you were doing something very connected with kid stuff when things went crazy?"

"Yeah, but you weren't," Kelsey said, starting to feel defensive "I thought we were looking for patterns, and not isolated examples."

Susan plopped her bunny on the table, as if shelving her own hypocrisy. "Speaking of patterns," she said, "you're pretty involved in coloring, there."

"Kinesthetic stimulation," Kelsey said, putting the blue crayon down- she was almost finished anyways. The accusations were starting to fly again, and each of them were instinctively trying to avoid giving the others ammo.

Oh God, Kelsey thought, is this my fault?

Smelling blood, Dakota jumped in and tapped on the picture of the duck. "You're staying in the lines, mostly. That's a little more than scribbling or fidgeting. You're full on coloring. And you seemed pretty into that cartoon flick before you-"

"OKAY!" Kelsey boomed. The entire daycare froze and stared to the art table the three of them had commandeered. Boys and girls in their twenties looked up from their blocks and tinker toys. The daycare workers all stared at her, ready to spring into action, ready to pounce to intervene should another tantrum erupt. Only the people involved in the changing of diapers -whether giving or receiving- stayed on task. Damn! She was caught, wasn't she? No point in justifying it anymore. Time to come clean. "OKAY!" she shouted again, forcing herself to sound cheery. "I LIKE COLORING!" The room collectively shrugged and went back to their puppets and dollies.

Forcing herself to lean in and whisper, Kelsey confided, "And stuffed animals. And Play-Doh. And Dr. Seuss. And cartoons. And lots of this stuff." Susan looked confused. Dakota looked smug. "But I don't like to wear diapers. And even if I did, I wouldn't want everyone to be forced into it."



It was Dakota who broke the silence. It started as a smirk that spread into a grin, that broke out into a chuckle until it became a full out guffawing belly laugh. “Oh my God!” she shrieked with laughter. Kelsey couldn’t tell whether it was mocking laughter or crazy laughter. “You’re a little!”

“A little what?” Kelsey asked.

“No, I mean you’re a little.” Dakota repeated herself.

“I mean, I know I’m kind of short, but...”

Dakota held up a hand to silence her. It worked. “You’re a little,” she said. “You like this kind of stuff. A fun Saturday night for you is Chuck-E-Cheese and silly-string, yeah?”

“I think it’s just being ‘young at heart’,” Susan said.

Kelsey shook her head. “It’s not a kink. I’m not that interested in sex, to be honest.”

“It doesn’t have to be sexual,” Dakota replied. She looked to Kelsey and then to Susan. Kelsey wasn’t exactly sure what her expression was, suddenly feeling very numb, but Susan clearly wasn’t happy at the woman in the onesie. “I’m not shaming,” Dakota held up her hands in defense. “I’m just calling a spade a spade. And there are people out there who are into this kind of stuff, with or without diapers.”

“How do-?” Susan started to ask, but then stopped herself.

Dakota answered anyways. “I went through a Fifty Shades of Grey phase,” she explained. “Figured I could find my own Christian. Went on Fetlife. Did some digging. Mostly creepers and uggos into weird shit. None of them rich.”

Kelsey dug her nails into her naked thighs so hard she thought they might bleed. Not only was she some kind of freak, but she might be responsible for the entire world being turned into a diapered side show. “That still doesn’t explain why everyone in the world besides us thinks this is normal.”

Whether it was a nervous habit, or an attempt to make Kelsey feel better about herself, Susan reached for her stuffed animal and placed it back in her lap. “Yeah, but there is a pattern,” she said. “You were attract...interested in kid stuff, I was trying to get away from being a kid-“

“And I was very much an adult doing adult things,” Dakota chimed in.

“Debatable,” Kelsey said, “But I see your point. There’s a spectrum. So you think we’re some kind of trinity or something? Like the Fates from Greek Myth or something?”

Susan bounced the rabbit on her knee. "I don't know."

"And I don't care," Dakota said. "I don't care about the 'why's' as much as the 'how's'. As in 'how do we get out of this mess?'"

"Short of divine intervention," Susan said, "I don't know." All three of them looked upward and saw only the ceiling. That didn't work.

"Frankly," Dakota said, "I wouldn't care if the Devil Himself came through those doors and offered us a way out. I'd take it. I'd sell my soul to get out of diapers and back into a thong." Again, all three of them glanced towards the doors of the daycare. Still nothing.

Worth a shot.

Kelsey laughed dryly. "Speaking of Hell," Kelsey said, "This is like Rugrats crossed with No Exit, y'know?" Clearly they didn't. She was met with blank looks from both of her companions. "Rugrats? Babies that talk?"

"We know what Rugrats are," Susan said. "What's the other reference?"

"Oh yeah," Kelsey said. "Sorry. No Exit is a play about people going to Hell, and their punishment is to be locked in a room together for all eternity. They don't know each other beforehand, and they have nothing in common, and they just drive each other crazy. It's where the phrase 'Hell is Other People' comes from."

More awkward silence from both of her companions. Eye contact was not made by any party. Susan twisted her bunny's ears. Dakota was starting to re-examine her coloring book. "I see your point," Susan said, breaking the silence just when Kelsey was starting to grab the blue crayon and finish coloring her duck.

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

More awkward silence. "Does that mean the others are all proof that ignorance is bliss?" Susan offered.

"They seem to be enjoying it." Dakota said.

"Maybe."

“Maybe.”

“Maybe.”

The silence continued.

And continued.

And continued.

“Why are you coloring that duck red, anyways?” Susan asked. “I don’t know any ducks that are red. Not that shade anyways.”

Kelsey’s head shot up. “What did you say?”

“Red duck,” Susan repeated, “Why are you making your duck red?”

“Are you colorblind or something?” Kelsey asked, fear welling up in her. “That’s not red.”

Dakota looked at Kelsey’s duck. “Fuck no, it’s not red,” she agreed. “It’s green.” There wasn’t a trace of irony or mockery in Dakota’s voice. She wasn’t pushing buttons. She wasn’t trolling. She was completely serious.

“Um...” Kelsey spoke up. “It’s blue. It’s a blue duck.”

Susan scoffed, her eyes darting from person to person, looking for the joke. “It’s red.”

“It’s green.”

“Guys,” Kelsey said, her voice trembling. “I think we might have forgotten our colors.”

Dakota hissed under her breath. “Shit.”

Susan reached for Kelsey’s blue crayon- though it might’ve been red, or green; there wasn’t a consensus. On the back of a coloring sheet she scribbled something on the paper and showed it to the other two. “If it’s one thing I know, it’s numbers,” she said. “I was an accounting major. What number is this?” Dakota leaned back, crossing her arms and biting her lip, nervously eyeing the pacifier dangling from her collar.

Squinting, Kelsey looked at what the other girl had drawn. It might’ve been a number. It might’ve been just lines on paper. Honestly, she couldn’t tell. “One?” Dakota said, obviously guessing. “It’s one, right?”

"It's four," Susan said, sounding almost offended. "Like two plus two is four."

Dakota frowned. "Doesn't look like a four to me."

"Or we've forgotten what four is supposed to look like," Kelsey spoke up. Then she added, "Or how to write it."

Grabbing another crayon -the color of which would likely be debated between the three- Dakota wrote something on another piece of paper, and showed it. "What does this say?" she asked.

"I'm more of a numbers gal," Susan admitted. "I don't know if I know that letter."

"Letter?" Dakota frowned. "There's more than one letter here."

"No there isn't," Kelsey corrected her. "That's just one letter...maybe."

"It's my name," Dakota insisted. "It says Dakota."

Shaking her head, Susan said, "Maybe YOU think it says Dakota, but I don't even know if that's a B or not."

Her throat drying up as her heart continued to pound harder and harder in her chest, Kelsey's child psychology courses were all flying back into her brain. Children often learned to write by insisting one letter stood for an entire word, and Susan didn't seem to realize that Dakota didn't start with a 'B' it started with a...a...shit! "We're being affected more than we think," Kelsey said, gravely. "We're going backwards, too. Just slower than everyone else!"

"Okay kids!" one of the daycare workers announced, interrupting their collective.

"Time to clean up. It's snack time!" She came over to the table. "Come on girls. Clean up the crayons. It's snack time." She picked up the picture and looked at it. "Oh, such a pretty orange duck, Kelsey! Would you like me to put it up on the wall?"

### 3.

#### Susan

Some people cry in the heat of the moment, when the explosions go off and the world is crumbling around them. They're caught up in the heat of the moment and feel the grief and fear and rage and angst when their heart is broken, or their car is crashed, or the flesh-eating monster is breathing down their neck. Others compartmentalize. They're emotionally overwhelmed and so to avoid a complete catatonic shutdown and to continue functioning they turn that vulnerable part of themselves off; they do their best to become clinical. They don't deny what's going on or what terrible fate has befallen them, but they just don't let it emotionally sink in until there's a time when they can afford to be vulnerable.

If they're lucky, their tears come after the giant has been slain, the obstacles have been surmounted, and their long-lost child has been reunited with them. These are always happy tears. The unlucky ones save up their tears and it comes at the worst times: after the funeral, or in an empty house, or in the quiet of a hospital room after visiting hours are over, and no one but a strange nurse is present to give even the coldest of comfort. These are the most bitter tears of all.

In the relative calm of the Big Little Daycare, surrounded by people she couldn't honestly call her friends, while snacks were being passed out, those bitter tears threatened to pour out of Susan.

She'd lost her potty training. She'd lost her dignity. She was wearing an outfit that she didn't want to be caught dead in, and that wasn't even taking the diaper into account. She'd lost any and all social standing or path to independence. And now she had confirmation that she was losing her mind along with everything else. Letters, colors, even written numbers; all seemed lost to her. She dared not try counting, or reciting the alphabet for fear that she'd find out just how little she was capable of....but how would she know?

Once a smart and independent young woman, Susan was regressing in her skills so much as to not even actively realize what she was losing until it was specifically pointed out to her. And now, it was snack time. This was as good a time for all of her frustration to bubble over as any.

Glasses pushed up to the top of her head, Susan started rubbing at her eyes, swatting away the tears before they could properly dribble down. Neither of her two similarly afflicted allies were stupid or insensitive enough to ask 'what's wrong', but she felt a petite hand rest on her shoulder from across the table and give her a gentle squeeze. Kelsey. "Sorry, Susie."

"Susan," Susan said without looking up. "Not Susie." She sniffed. "Only my Mommy calls me Susie."

“Do you normally call her Mo?-ow!” Dakota said before Kelsey cut her off with a hard smack on the arm. “What?!” she demanded. “It’s a for real question!”

The would-be accountant looked up from her own lap. “Huh?”

“You know you’ve been referring to your mother as ‘Mommy’ this entire time, right?” Dakota said, before staring daggers back at Kelsey. Susan sat up a little straighter. She had? Mentally, she replayed the last several hours.

“Ooooooh.”

“Toldja she didn’t realize it.” Dakota again. Not that Susan fully registered it. She’d retreated into herself. Her mother had been just ‘Mom’ for the longest time; or ‘Janet’ when Susan was mad at her. But ‘Mommy’? No one but spoiled little girly girls called their mothers ‘Mommy’. Her mother hadn’t been ‘Mommy’ in Susan’s mind since at least kindergarten, when the other kids- especially the boys- made fun of her for it. And Susan hadn’t been ‘Susie’ since long before then. She hadn’t thought of herself as ‘Susie’ since...since...

A whiff of stale urine and feces and the sound of muted crinkling drew Susan out of herself. “Guys,” she said, “I thought we agreed, no dirty di-“ Both Kelsey and Dakota were both looking directly at her. “It’s not me, is it?” She felt the blood drain away from her face, then flood safely back to normal when the others shook their heads, grimly. Susan followed their eyes and her nose towards the source of the stench.

“Snack time!” a girl with long black braided hair said from behind Susan, the big snack cart being pushed behind her by a grown-up woman. “And it’s my turn to be the waitress! I’m helpin’! I’m a helper!” Bingo.

Dakota was the first to growl, but Kelsey was the first to speak. “No thanks, Alice, we’re not-“

“IIIIIIIIII’M HELPIN’!” Alice stomped her feet loudly. “I’m helpin’! I’m helpin’! I’m helpin’!” Something about this girl seemed to rub both of Susan’s compatriots the wrong way, and Susan couldn’t quite put her finger on the why of it.

But before Susan could ask for a snack, a tiny pre-packaged vacuum sealed blueberry muffin was placed down in front of her. Fair enough. Beggars didn’t always get to be choosers, and if muffins was all they had- A mini box of nilla wafers was slammed down in front of Kelsey, and a bag of plain potato chips slid towards Dakota. The girl passing out the snacks started to waddle away, her backside sagging more than a little bit, when Kelsey called out. “Excuse me,” Susan called out to Alice. The girl who’d slung the pre-packaged snacks at them so carelessly, without style, aplomb, or manners, stopped, even as the grown-up continued pushing the cart filled with snacks onward.

Alice tapped her foot impatiently. “What?”

“Could I please have something else?” Susan asked, trying to sound as reasonable as possible.

In response, Alice got a saccharine sweet smile. “Sorry. You don’t get ta choose. I’m waitress today. I choose who gets what snacks. If you wanna trade, you can trade, I guess.”

“That’s not fai-“

Susan’s reply was cut off when Alice butted in and said “That’s how it works. If you were a real waitress, you’d know.” With a flourish, Alice turned around and “accidentally” bumped into Susan, even going so far as to step back a bit so that her behind all out collided with the young woman’s head. “Whoopsie daisy,” she said, barely feigning embarrassment as her steaming backside brushed up against the side of Susan’s cheek. She could feel warmth coming off Alice...but she knew it wasn’t body heat. There were too many layers between the other girl’s bottom and Susan’s face for her to feel plain old body heat. Then there was the feeling of a wet, almost pulpy smooch up against her face.

Susan had been back in diapers for less than a full day, but even she knew that a dry, clean diaper didn’t feel like that. The godawful smell was a none too subtle a hint, either. Alice might have said “Oopsie daisy,” but the similarities to the flower ended there. That meant that...that...

Looking over to her classmates for help, Susan could only make out Kelsey’s completely shocked expression and Dakota’s desperately trying to stop herself from laughing out loud.

Right then. Right then as Alice waddled off to continue her reign of snack food tyranny, acting as if she hadn’t just DEFILED Susan with her rank and disgusting mess. That was the moment when something deep down inside Susan snapped. She had lost a lot of things over the last twenty-four hours. She couldn’t dress herself, or remember her colors, or read or write, or even control her bladder and bowels...but God dammit, she could wait on tables, AND HOW DARE THIS BITCH SAY THAT SUSAN DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO DO THAT WHILE DOING SUCH A PISS POOR JOB AT IT HERSELF!

Alice might have realized that she was pushing buttons. Susan’s Mommy had long worked at or been a presence at Ma’s Diner even before Susan had been born. Even with this strange hiccup in reality that made everyone her age a social toddler, people seemed to have most of their memories intact and their personalities were always spot on. So Alice was likely a terrible person- ‘Dakota Lite’ if you will- even before this. All things considered, she may or may not have known that her last comment meant war...but it did.

“Miss...miss...” Susan shot her hand upward before realizing she had no idea what the people who worked here were named. Even if they had their names on their shirts, Susan was sadly

confident that she couldn't read them. Instead, Susan settled for shouting "TEACHER! TEEEEEEACHER!" She was expected to be a little dumb, might as well play it up.

The cart stopped. The recognized adult doubled back, and knelt over to make eye contact.

"Yes, Susan?" she asked. "Do you need help opening your snack?"

With big puppy dog eyes and a completely innocent smile, Susan looked up at her captor and said "No ma'am. It's just I think Alice needs ta be changed. She's 'tinky.'" For effect, Susan waved her hand in front of her face and pinched her nose, making it a point to giggle as if she weren't really offended by the smell, but imitating what 'adults' did around babies with shitty pants.

The daycare worker pushing the snack tray seemed to consider this, her mouth twisting off to one side as her eyes moved to the other direction. Then she said, "That's so nice of you, Susan. I'll make sure to check and change her after she's done passing out the snacks."

The mask of innocence melted into one of thoughtful introspection; as if Susan were considering her words very carefully, even though she'd instantly known what she was going to say.

"Buuuuut," she said, "if she's walkin' around with poop in her diapee, and handin' out food that doesn't seem very san...san..." Sanitary. The word was 'sanitary'. Susan knew this, of course, but everyone seemed to view her as cute but naïve and ignorant, so why not use it to her advantage to disarm people? (Ye gods, was this what flirting was like? She felt a little bit dirty at the thought.)

In the corner of her eye, Susan saw that both Dakota and Kelsey were slack-jawed. Apparently, Susan was more convincing than she'd thought. She turned briefly to them and gave them a wink to let them know that she was still very much in the driver's seat.

"Sanitary?" the teacher took the bait. "Oh sweetie, I think it's fine. The food is all pre-packaged anyways and her poopy is in her diaper."

"But she's not wearin' gloves or nothin'," Susan whined a bit. "What if she scratched her butt?"

"It's fine, honey. Quit worrying." Then the teacher added. "Would you like me to get you a new snack from the cart? That way you wouldn't have to worry?"

Susan smoothed out her dress and continued to do her best to look cute and stupid, like there wasn't a thought in her head. "Oh, it's not me I'm worried 'bout, teacher ma'am," she said. "It's the 'specter."

"The what...?" the middle aged woman echoed. All the while, Alice was giving kids random goodies off the cart, oblivious to the verbal chess match that was going on right behind her poop covered backside.

Time for her final move. "My Mommy always tells me we gotta be extra careful 'round



food or else the health 'specter will come and get us." She shivered a bit, as if the health inspector was some kind of bogey man that Restaurateurs warned their children about. Susan saw the older woman mouth the words 'Health Inspector'.

Checkmate.

"Alice," the lady called out. Alice looked over her shoulder after giving someone a box of crackers that they clearly didn't want. Her diaper was almost swelling out of her leggings. The fabric was stretched so taught that Susan could pretty much see through it and gaze upon the big white diaper...only it wasn't white anymore. Was that a tinge of brown in the back? Girl really did need a change, after all. "Time to get a diaper change."

Alice rotated around fully to face the teacher, her mouth agape in protest. The forbies behind her immediately started laughing out loud, their eyes bugging out of their heads at what was going on in Alice's backside. Her rump might as well have been in a funhouse mirror. "But I'm a waitress!"

"You need to be changed honey," the daycare lady said, firmly, brooking no argument.

"But...but..."

"Snack time can wait until after you're all cleaned up, missy."

Dakota's hand shot up. "Oooooo! Oooo! We can help!" she said. "We're good helpers. We can finish what Alice started while she goes and gets changed! We're the bestest helpers!" she turned to Kelsey. "Right?"

"Huh?" Kelsey said before catching on. "Oh yeah! Right! We'll help."

"We'll pass out the snacks," Susan said. "We've done it like a billion times before." This was a lie as far as Susan was concerned, but considering the altered history of events that her mommy- Mom...her mother...Janet- had described to her, it was likely true as far as the rest of the daycare knew.

"But I'M the waitress!" Alice stomped her feet again.

Rising to her feet, Susan rocked back on her heels and played with the hem of her too short dress, tilting her head for maximum cuteness. "I watch my Mommy do it all the time," she insisted.

"Well..."

Then in a moment of pure fortuity, in their most adorable, lovably manipulative tones, all three of the girls said, "Pweeeeeeease!"

The sigh that came out of the daycare worker's lips was the last of her fight leaving her lungs. "...all right."

"Noooooooooooo!" Alice screamed as she was dragged towards a nearby changing room by her wrist, her feet dragging uselessly. "I! DON'T! WANNA! BE! CHANGED! I'M! A! WAITRESS!"

Meanwhile, the only three sane people left in the world decided to have a bit of fun. "Glove up, girls," Susan says. "If we're gonna play restaurant we're going to do it right." Fortunately, it being a daycare for giant babies, there was always a bottle of hand sanitizer and a box of disposable gloves within easy reach, and all three girls were properly gloved.

As Alice screamed from the changing room as she was being stripped of both her leggings and her own bit of fun, the other so-called adults in the room looked on curiously, waiting to see if the trio would use their newfound freedom to make their own lives harder or easier. In short, they weren't sure if harmless fun was about to happen, or a full blown food fight. "What now?" Kelsey asked.

"Hold off on opening your snacks!" she yelled across the tables of adult children. "Snack time is under new management! Our wait staff will be around shortly to serve you and take your orders!"

Murmurs of 'restaurant' and 'game' and 'pretend' and 'play' circled around the collective snack tables. Grown-ups smiled and nodded approvingly, chuckling to themselves even as they kept a careful watch for mischief makers.

As Dakota rounded up the snacks for redistribution, Kelsey asked, "So I guess you're the boss here. What's the plan?"

Fully in her element, or as close to as possible, Susan smirked confidently. "I'll take the orders and shout them back. It's like a game. Listen to what I'm saying. Everything is going to be in code to keep you sharp."

"How are you going to take the orders?" Kelsey asked. "You can't write anything down, anymore."

The ex-waitress tapped her forehead. "They'll be up here. I'll remember them."

Dakota came back, her arms filled with the disgusting and bland snacks Alice had deigned to pass out, likely keeping the good stuff for herself. "Uh...you can't even remember your colors."

"There are things that I knew before I even learned colors." With that, Susan zipped around the tables taking orders and committing them to memory. She'd lost most of her academic skills, and it would take a miracle for her to be an accountant again, but not even her life foisting some

bizarre fantasy world onto her could take this task. “I need two spare tires, a heap of tooty fruity creepy crawlies, and a Wayne Brady, hold the moo juice.”

Though there were no words spoken, the collective sentiment from the entire room as Susan waddle-trotted back to the snack cart was one giant “Huh?” The diapered waitress sighed. “That’s two donuts, some gummy worms, and an Oreo but no milk to dunk it in.”

“Ooooooooooooh!”

And thus the game began in earnest:

“Bean paste on a raft and put a roof on it!” meant peanut butter and cracker sandwiches. “Middle aged lady” was code for a muffin top. “Everything but all that,” was a bag of chips. A box of animal crackers was a “Travelin’ Zoo”, and a “Snakey Rainbow” was Skittles.

Everyone laughed, and once Kelsey and Dakota- arguably the only other two women their age in the world capable of understanding the linguistic tricks of Greasy Spoon lingo- got the idea, things moved ahead and a brisk pace. The giant children would purposefully try to not copy one another, eager to see what their favorite snacks would be translated into, giggling while they waited to order, then guffawing once their goldfish crackers were dubbed “a dry aquarium.”

“I need ants on a log!”

“What?” Dakota asked, searching the snack tray for something, anything that might match that description.

Susan laughed a bit. “Y’know...celery stick, with peanut butter on it and raisins on the top. You don’t call it ants on a log?”

“Ooooooh!”

Part waitress, part performer, and completely in charge; Susan was almost beginning to feel like her old self. Almost. Even as a game, this was refreshing and self-affirming. Come to think of it, it was a bit of a game back in the good old days, wasn’t it? The good old days...a thought that made her shudder a little, and her bladder release. The sudden wet warmth in her diaper told her that she needed to get changed, but her own personal work ethic entwined with the joy of play made her not want to stop. She hadn’t thought of her time working in Mommy’s restaurant as The Good Old Days before now. If only there had been a way to know she was in the good old days before she had left them.

Don’t focus on that, she chided herself. Just stay in the moment. She could change AFTER everyone had been served.

“Almost done, Susie!” Dakota called out.

Susan turned back and called out. “I know!” then tacked on, “And don’t call me Susie!” Almost out of breath from all the hustling she’d been doing, taking and delivering orders, she went to the last forever baby and tapped her on the shoulder. “Can I take your order?”

A fake smile and scornful eyes framed by braided black hair turned around and met her gaze. “I dunno...Susie. What do you think I should have?”

“My name’s not Susie, it’s Susan.”

“Sorry, Susie.” Alice said, a cat and canary grin and a gaze that wished death upon her plastered on her face. “I won’t make that mistake again, Susie. Oops!”

“Stop calling me-“

“Susie.”

“My name is-“

“I know. I know. Sorry. Susan.”

“May I take your order?” Susan repeated herself through a clenched jaw.

“I dunno. You’re the waitress. You should pick for me....Susie.”

“I AM NOT SUSIE!”

“Your mommy calls you Susie, Susie.” Alice mocked. “Why can’t I call you Susie?” Susan had had it! “Nobody calls me ‘Susie’ except my MOMMY and...and...and...”

\*\*\*\*\*

Gentle Reader,

Memory is a funny, fickle thing. Recent memories are akin to documentaries and news clips playing in the cinema of your mind; playing exactly as they happened, beat for beat. Fond but distant memories become heavily dramatized, changing with each retelling and reminiscence; actors perfecting their part and improvising as the audience responds to each line.

Then there’s the long forgotten and buried memories; the ones that happened so long ago that you don’t consciously remember them, and upon visiting them seem much like an old Fairy Tale. They’re stories that happened to someone who looked very much like you, but who wasn’t you. They’re not memories but distant histories at best, or fairy tales that morals can be gleaned from. This is in fact a lie, but as in all lies, there is an element of truth to this: When we

are thirty, we are not who we were when we were twenty-one. Nor is that twenty-one year old version of ourselves very much like us when we were twelve; and that twelve-year-old is a stranger to us when we were aged two.

Philosophically speaking, this is a small (if impotent) mercy that the Lords of Fate and Hearth bestow upon us: The ability to remember the past not as if it happened to us, but to someone else; someone who we've long since outgrown and left behind. It makes it easier to shrug off the mistakes; especially since those mistakes so rarely affect us in the now.

It is with that tender (if impotent) mercy that the following memory is presented in the manner and tone: As a Fairy Tale.

Once upon a time there were three little girls who were the best of friends. Their names were Susie, Dakota, and Kelsey

Susie was a pretty girl, resplendent in her infantile femininity; her Mommy clothing her in only the frilliest and most beautiful of toddler dresses and gowns. She wanted nothing more than to be just like her Mommy when she grew up.

Dakota was sweet and angelic. There was never a little tot as nice and mild in temperament as she; always sharing and giving of herself, always looking to make friends.

Kelsey was insightful and articulate for her age. She is what her parents called "wise beyond her years" though perhaps "precocious" would be a better word for it.

The three had formed an instant and unbreakable bond that they shared even before they had gained the ability to talk as the adults did. Alas, no bond is truly unbreakable, as the three girls found out. Even though they were practically still babes in their mother's arms, still sleeping in their cribs and needing diapers to keep their clothes otherwise pristine, they were growing up and moving on far too fast.

They were almost too old for daycare, their parents had all told them. Over the summer, they would be potty trained now that they were old enough and their parents would have the time. Then they'd have another year, at most, until they went to something called "pre-school" and although their parents didn't specifically tell them this- not being particularly aware of the depth of their friendship- they would never see each other again. Their little town was just big enough so that all three would go to different schools when the time came. How would they see each other again?

"I don't wanna grow up," said Susie. "Growin' up sounds pooppy."

"Me neiver," Dakota agreed, sucking on her pacifier. "I don't wanna get big. I don't wanna lose my fwiends."

“Everybody gets big,” Kelsey replied. “But I don’t wanna grow up.” Then seeing that her friends didn’t fully appreciate the nuance, she explained. “It’s differnt.

Yet what could they do? A fair question indeed, gentle reader. A fair question indeed. They found their answer one early morning. The sun was still down, and the stars were still out, and their Mommies and Daddies had entrusted them to the tender ministrations of the daycare workers. For their entertainment, an animated feature about an old man making a wish upon a star and the adventure of the little wooden boy that came alive because of it. It wasn’t the true story, but rather a retelling as told by a liar and a fraud named Walt. Yet even in lies there can be truth.

“When you wish upon a star  
Makes no difference who you are  
Anything your heart desires  
Will come to you.”

“I gotta idea!” Susie leapt to her feet and ran to the window. “We just gotta wish upon a star, and we we’ll stop growin’ up!”

“Everybody gets big, Susie.” Kelsey said, following her. “My Mommy and Daddy told me so.”

“Yeah, but you said it’s differnt!” Susie replied. “We hafta get bigger. But we can still be babies if we wanna. We just gotta wish hard!”

Dakota agreed. “That’th how it worked in the movie. Just wish hard”

“But that’s justa movie.” Kelsey said. “Stars are really really far. It’d take forever for a wish like that to get there.”

“How long?” Susie asked.

“Like...twenty years or somethin’?!” Dakota suggested, twenty being the highest number she knew.

“Yeah!” Kelsey agreed. “It’d take forever. Twenty years.”

“Better late than never,” Susie replied. “That’s what my Mommy always says. C’mon. Let’s wish.”

So they did.

“I wish we’d never have to grow up, even if we get big,” said Susie.

"I wish we could always play together and be bestest friends forever," added Kelsey

"And that no other kid will have to grow up either," finished Dakota, not wanting to be selfish. If they were going to reap the benefits of their wish, so should everyone.

Not knowing what else to say, they sealed it with something they had heard their parents say when they were making wishes. "Hommen".

And so the wish floated up, up, up, into the heavens. And because the girls in their sincere childlike belief believed that the star, a strange kind of god- something that was once worshipped as a god long ago as a matter of fact-would hear their wish/prayer, it did. And since they thought it would take twenty years for their innocent but powerful invocation to reach the star, that's exactly how long it took.

\*\*\*\*\*

"... and my best friends. My best friends called me Susie." Dakota finished the sentence as a long forgotten memory welled up from her subconscious. The bitter, angry, sorrowful tears threatened Susan no more; they came in full force and attacked with all their might. Gripped in panic and remorse, the truth spilled out of her mouth like words from a prophet. "Guys!" she bawled, falling into a heap on the floor. "It was us! We fucked the world! We did it! Our fault! Our fault!"

And the words rang true in Dakota and Kelsey's ears and they knew them to be fact. As if her words were a key to their own long agos, long forgotten memories of who they once were-and were once again becoming-resurfaced; the same two words echoing again and again in their collective grey matter.

Our fault.

Our fault.

Our fault.

## **CHAPTER 6**

*Friends,*

*What can defeat magic, this reality bending yet fundamental force of the cosmos? What can possibly contend with something that makes wonders by working one's will? The foolish magician will say "nothing". Nothing can beat magic. That's why it's "magic". Swords rust. Soldiers die. Eventually the sun and stars will burn out of existence. But magic? Magic is forever. Magic wins.*

*Look around though, friends. If magic is real, and so potent as to make the sky kiss the ground, why isn't there more of it? Even with the limitations of belief and the human psyche, all it would really take is two to three potent magicians to make belief a papier-mâché barrier. Seeing is believing, isn't it? So why haven't we seen more of it?*

*Why are we not running around with our magic wands casting whatever spells need to be cast to make our lives more bearable. Or at the very least, why are we not currently being ruled over by magical god kings as the legends of nearly every culture depict?*

*If you've read this far, you can surmise that the most "logical" reason isn't "magic isn't real". It's because at some point in the forgotten history of humankind, magic was defeated and dispelled from reality; all of the potent energy of the mortal imagination and desire rendered latent, just waiting to be tapped into again.*

*The question still remains, though. What can beat magic?*

*-An excerpt from "Do You Believe In Magic?" By Cornelius Crowley.*

**1.**

**Susie**

Tears made the room blurry. They made Susie's face hot and uncomfortable. The hot wet feeling of them dripping down her cheek and onto her polka dot dress was a constant reminder of her own folly. The little balloons of snot that bubbled out of her nose whenever she exhaled weren't much better either.

She'd been crying for the better part of an hour, Susie estimated. They had all been crying; Kelsey and Dakota, too. The other Forbies would be crying too if they knew what the three of them knew. Any sane and rational person would.

They had doomed themselves. They had doomed roughly everyone in the world who was close to their age. All because of some stupid wish that had decided to come true twenty years too late. No more college. No more jobs. No more cars, or sex, or money, or privacy, or anything



that made being an adult bearable; all because Susie and her little friends hadn't wanted to grow up.

Susie had been the first to remember it, that fateful early morning in a daycare not unlike this one. She wasn't the last though. Her screeching, panicked cries of "Guys! It was us! We fucked the world! We did it! Our fault! Our fault!" had not fallen on deaf ears. The world had been placed under a leaky faucet, but Susie could still recognize her companions clapping their hands over their mouth and screaming.

Whatever bit of mundane detritus that had kept that memory of that day trapped in the bowels of the girls' subconscious had been swept away with Susie's proclamation, and her own lone wail had become a chorus of shrieks and swears.

The swear words hadn't fallen on the deaf ears of the grown-ups, either. Hands on shoulders were shirked off, and admonitions and cries of "language!" were drowned out by a sonic sea of bellowing curses.

"TIME OUT! ALL THREE OF YOU! TIME OUT!"

Susie hadn't known who'd said it, hadn't heard where the voice had come from, but something about that phrase had sparked something inside of her.

Time out?

Time out?!

She'd gone from diapers to underwear; from elementary school to graduation; from the kitchen of her mom's greasy spoon to college; all waiting for the time when she could finally be her own person. Now some cosmic force that was beyond her twenty-two year old comprehension-never mind her two year old comprehension-had yanked her back to the very beginning. And there she'd wait. Forever. Forever Mommy's little girl needing to be dressed in frilly outfits, spoon fed in a high chair, pushed around in a stroller, and have her diaper checked and changed for her lest she get a rash. Her entire life was in time out right now.

She'd looked down at Flopsy lying on the floor where the stuffed animal had been dropped. "No fair." Flopsy was right. If she was going to time out, she might as well earn it. Even Dakota had let out a yelp of surprise when the first chair went flying.

Then the second had happened. Then the third. Then screams of fear and delight joined the three girl's wailing as they became a living hurricane, tearing through the entire playroom in a blur of fury and misdirected self-hatred. Snacks went sailing through the air. Blocks created a minefield along the floor. Tables became barricades as more of the forever babies joined in, though much more jovial than the three who started it.

It had been half food fight, half toddler temper tantrum, and half-prison riot. Some part of Susie's brain told her that there was something wrong about that, the math didn't work out or something; but she couldn't quite put her finger on the "why" as she had sent coloring pages ripped free from their books and crumpled into little balls hurtling ceiling word.

The great Big Little Daycare Riot didn't last long, though. From Susie's vantage point, she'd been stuck as a twenty something toddler for a little over a day. She and her fellow hell-pavers still retained memories of being big girls, almost grown-ups themselves. To the rest of the world though, they'd never gotten as far as pre-school before their condition of being "forever babies" had been diagnosed.

That meant that the workers of the Big Little Daycare had existed in a world for sometime where their occupation was half nanny, half psychologist, and half insane asylum orderly. Susie, Dakota, and Kelsey trashing the room was just another day at the office for them.

The other children were shuffled outside to the playground and in short order the three were cornered and contained, with adults pinning them to the floor as they uselessly thrashed and screamed. The fight hadn't lasted long after that.

The cleanup had.

The good news was that the Daycare had a strict "no spanking" policy. The bad news is that that didn't exempt Susie from punishment of any sort. So while the rest of their class stuck in arrested development was having an impromptu play session outside, the three girls were stuck cleaning up their mess under adult supervision.

This was difficult, Susie found, because not only did she not remember how the playroom was supposed to look; her first visit being only a few hours ago, but she was having trouble with even more basic skills.

"Hey Dakota? Do you remember where the coloring books are s'posed to go?" Dakota looked up from the pile of blocks she'd swept together with her hands. She rolled her eyes. "With the other coloring books."

"But what table?"

Kelsey was still picking crumbs out of the carpet. "The circle one...I think. We were there a second before...this-"she gestured to the wrecked playroom.

Biting her lip, Susie nervously asked, "Which one is the circle again?" She must have been quieter than she thought, whispering when she had meant to speak. Neither of her friends replied or even looked up from their own cleaning.

If the grown-ups had heard her, they made no move to help. They stuck to the peripheries, mumbling to themselves and each other about the three naughty girls' behavior as of late, constantly asking themselves "What got into them?" If they knew the truth, Susie imagined, their skulls would cave in.

On her end, the work was going infinitely slower than it should have been. It was difficult to clean with only one hand, but something inside Susie couldn't bear to let go of Flopsy. "Coloring is at the circle table," Flopsy told her. "The one that is shaped like a door." Oh yeah. She gave her old companion a quick, sneaky smile as she waddled and put the coloring books down on the circle table.

Waddling?

Frowning a little, Susan felt the swelling diaper gently nudging her legs apart and widened her gait to compensate. Her faux underwear was still holding the diaper up, but even now she was aware of a certain droopiness. With her free index finger, she poked between her legs, and felt the distinct squish beneath her prodding. Gone was the signature crisp crinkle of even a mostly dry diaper.

She was wet. Really wet. Not uncomfortable. Not dripping. But still. Wet. When had that happened? She'd remembered peeing a little bit when she was passing out snacks, but she shouldn't be this wet, should she? When had she gotten so squishy and why hadn't she noticed? "Teacher?"

A grown-up came over to Susie, and even though they were about the same height, it felt like she was looking down on her. "Yes, Susan?"

Susie's voice caught in her throat, and her face glowed to match the puffy sleeves of her dress. Needed or not, it was still embarrassing for her to ask to be stripped and wiped just so she could piss herself all over again.

Instead of speaking to her deed, Susie pointed between her legs and gave her diaper a quick squish. The adult's probing hand followed suit and squeezed the front of Susie's crotch. "You're wet alright." Two foreign fingers slipped past her panties and into the leg hole of Susie's diaper. "But not too wet. Finish cleaning up the room, and then maybe I'll change you."

A kind of dread overcame Susie. The rule! What about the rule! "But I gotta go potty!" Susie almost dropped Flopsy, grasping at the air where the grown-up used to be. She hadn't meant to say that, of course. The words had just slipped out. It's just that, as per the rules they had made up this morning, she shouldn't be doing anything in a wet diaper except trying to get changed; it was the closest thing to toilet autonomy that was available to her at the moment. "I gotta go potty..."

The daycare worker stopped and turned around. "Honey, you're not potty trained, you're a forever baby." The words dripped with equal parts maternal love and condescension. "Now back to work, and then you can go play."

Susie sulked and started gathering up the crayons off the floor. Dang things had rolled everywhere. They had all been in one location, but all it took was one tantrum to scatter them to the four corners of the room.

Each step across the floor made another squish as the big baby became increasingly aware of her diaper. The darn thing was like a mosquito bite. She hadn't noticed it before, but now that she did, she couldn't stop thinking about it.

Step. Squish. Step. Squish. Step. Step. Squish. Squish. She'd already tuned out the crinkling sound every time she shifted her weight, but now it felt like there was no crinkle and all sopping wet squish. How she missed the crinkle! How sad was it that she was starting to look forward to getting her diaper changed?

A slight aching in the soles of her feet was starting to take her mind off her diaper. Were her feet already getting sore? Was it really taking her and her friends that long to clean up the mess they'd made, or had Susie just lost the ability to accurately keep track of time? Considering her bad luck with the coloring and her good luck with the circle table, Susie estimated that her odds were fifty-fifty-fifty. One thing was for certain, it was a lot easier to make a mess than it was to clean it up.

That last admission left a nasty taste in Susie's mouth. It was easier to mess things up than to clean them up; that was the story of her life right now. And yet her most immediate concern was still how wet her diaper was. Maybe Mommy was right. Maybe she was just a baby.

"You're not a baby," Flopsy told her. "You're totally a big girl!"

Kelsey came up to her, her hands flecked with the corpses of animal crackers. Bits of stepped on Oreos had somehow made it into her hair. "Don't worry about the whole clean diaper rule," she said. "It's not something we could've really controlled anyways." She stole a look at Dakota busily trying to fit peg blocks into their proper holes (and having a Devil of a time with it). "I think it was just a power play by Dakota anyways."

Her tears finally starting to dry, Susie looked at her two friends- the one in front of her, and the one in the crook of her arm-and smiled. "Thanks," she sniffed. A quick drag of her nose across her forearm got most of the green slime dangling from her nose.

"Ew." Kelsey looked like she wanted to back away, and her torso was a few steps ahead of her legs.

Her brain caught up to her nose in that instant. Wet diaper. Okay. Mucus on the arm. Not good. Wet and sticky stuff was okay, but only if other people couldn't see it. She should have known that. She was a big girl. "Sorry." She grabbed a stray piece of coloring book and swabbed her arm with it. "Sorry."

"It's alright."

"Hey!" Dakota called out from across the room.. "So you bit....you b-words all had the same flashback as me, right?"

Across the room joints locked and hair stood on the back of their legs. Susie and Kelsey's mouths slammed shut, but their eyes were screaming at Dakota: WHY ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THIS NOW?! WE'RE NOT ALONE. DO YOU WANT TO GET CAUGHT?

"Dakota, what are you talking about?" one of the supervising grown-ups called out, giving voice to the others' eyes.

Dakota rocked back and forth on her feet, averting her gaze while keeping her hands behind her back. "Sorry Miss grown-up ma'am. I'm just playin' a pretend game to make the work go faster. Is that okay?"

"What are you playing?"

"I'm pretendin' that me and Kelsey and Susan are all grown-ups instead a Forbies, and that we're bein' made to do this work because of magic that turned us into Forbies instead cuz we was naughty."

Susie looked over at the grown-ups leaning against the wall. "But you were naughty, baby."

"I know. I'm just pretendin' so I don't cry so much and can get the work done."

"As long as you finish cleaning up."

"Yes ma'am." Dakota's eyes twinkled back at Susie: OH HELL YEAH!

With a clicker clack the leftover crayons tumbled from Susie's grasp. Of course they could talk openly about this! Everyone thought they were babies! Who cared about what babies talked to each other about?

Picking up the crayons, Susie waddled over to Dakota. "What happened to you? You were so nice."

Haphazardly, Dakota threw more shapes in a circle shaped bucket. "I grew up."

From the crook of Susie's arm, Flopsy snickered, "You sure about that?" Bested by a stuffed animal, Dakota could only frown in confusion as Susie snickered at her bunny's comeback, and waddled off to get more crayons.

Kelsey tilted a bookshelf up off the floor. "This is like the weirdest high school reunion ever."

"I don't know," Dakota mused. "Seems pretty standard to me. A bunch of people hanging out, catching up, and realizing they haven't accomplished much."

Susie was almost done cleaning up all the crayons. "Yeah, but instead of being like 'So you don't have a job, either?'," she added, "It's more like 'So you don't go potty no more, either, huh?" All of them had a good, bitter laugh at that. Susie's voice rang out the loudest, and before too long, she realized that her friends were staring at her, and they looked a little uncomfortable. Were they wet, too?

"Are you feeling alright?" Kelsey asked.

Susie shrugged. "I mean. Not really. This whole thing sucks. But at least we know why it sucks."

Kelsey finally noticed the crumbs in her hair and brushed them out over a wastebasket. "We've got a diagnosis. What's the prescription?"

They continued cleaning up. "Make another wish?" Susie offered.

Dakota rolled her eyes, and pointed suggestively to the padded bulge covered by her onesie. "Yeah, and meanwhile have another twenty years of this."

"Better late than never...?" Flopsy offered. No one thought it was particularly funny. Feeling an urge to bail her stuffie out, Susie scrambled to keep things on track. "Maybe we can get potty trained again?" More staring. "Hear me out. We're babies, yeah?"

"Yeeeeeah..." Dakota allowed. Her eyes narrowed, as if wondering where Susie was going with this.

Wet diaper squishing between her legs, Susie took a deep breath. Concentrate. Concentrate. "If we can't change back, maybe we can work around the rules of this world."

"What are you getting at?"

Susie held her hand out to ward off any stinging rebuke from Dakota. "Hear me out. There are genius babies, right? Like cases of super smart babies that can go to college...?"

“Not quite,” Kelsey said. “But I think I see what you’re getting at…”

Finally! Someone was getting her. “Maybe we stop trying to be grown-up? I mean we’ll still BE grown-ups…but since we can’t convince anybody…maybe we settle for being really smart Forbies?”

“One problem with that,” Kelsey said. “I don’t think we’re smart anymore.” A sad frown spread over her face, like it was painful just to make that admission out loud.

“WE ARE TOO SMART!” Flopsy protested.

“Yeah!” Susie agreed.

Dakota was turning her pacifier back over in her hands again; an addict with a pipe. “Why are you so excited to admit that we’re turning into idiots?”

“We’re not losing stuff!”

Lips curled in disgust, Dakota retorted. “Really? I’m pretty sure we had an argument over colors and we were all wrong. F-ing colors! We’re losing more than our potty training. We’re losing Kindergarten shhhh---shtuff. So dumb!”

From behind her glasses, Susie blinked in surprise. “But we didn’t wish to be dumb. Just babies.”

A foot stomp on the floor, punctuated Dakota’s impending tantrum. “What’s the difference?! Dumb and babies are practically the same thing!” Susie’s lip started to tremble. She wasn’t dumb! She was smart; super smart! She’d figure this whole thing out and they’d be back to normal in no time.

But why was Dakota being so mean? She used to be so nice. Then they all went away and started to grow up and they forgot all about each other and now everything was wrong. She had her best friends back with her, but now they were all miserable. An innocent wish had finally come true, and now it was the opposite of a wish.

Kelsey stepped between the two taller girls. “I think this um…game…is getting a little too intense, guys. Don’t you think?” She looked at Susie. “Are you okay, Susan?”

“Yeah,” Flopsy echoed from the crook of Susie’s arm. “Are you okay?”

“Of course I’m okay,” Susie scoffed. “Why is everybody asking me that right now?”

“It’s okay if you’re kinda frazzled,” Kelsey said. She put a hand on Susie’s shoulder. “I think I’d be the same in your shoes.” Susie stepped back, aghast.

She didn't have time to ask what Kelsey meant by that. Dakota filled in the blanks for her. "Ip wush yer iyea." She'd gone back to the pacifier, but every garbled word was clear enough. "Vaf how I 'memur ip." In an instant, Flopsy was clutched to Susie's chest, a shield against the terrible accusations being hurled towards her.

"It was not!" Susie insisted.

"Wuf too,"

"Was not"

"Wuf too!"

"WAS N-"

"Okay girls!", one of the grown-ups said. "I think you've had enough, punishment. Go out and play."

The three were ripped from their sphere of self-involvement. It was Kelsey who spoke up. "But we're not done, yet."

"You've done enough. Go play." Another grown-up was wheeling out a vacuum cleaner as the first bent over and picked up a crayon that Susie had missed. "We've gotta get ready for lunch," they'd said to each other.

Kelsey shuddered...or peed a little...Susie couldn't tell...and said, "They've given up on us. We can't even clean up a mess properly."

"Vey fink weah bay-bees."

"Babies don't clean up messes," Flopsy added.

"At least there's one good thing about bein' a forever baby," Susie admitted.

Shaking her head, Kelsey huffed, "Let's just talk about this outside, okay?" Wordlessly, they agreed and waddle-trudged outside.

Before she crossed the threshold out into the playground, the grown-up that Susie had begged to change her caught her attention. "You did a good job cleaning up, Susan." Susie looked at the still half-done job. Bits of what were now confetti still littered the ground and there were toys that were clearly on the wrong shelf. Obvious lie is obvious. "Do you want me to change you now?"



Her friends were already a few steps ahead of her onto the playground, making a bee-line for the safety of the old rusty slide and not looking back. She shook her head. “No, I’m okay. Gotta catch up.”

A firm hand on her shoulder stopped her from taking another step. “Just a second, sweetie.” Great; another grown-up who was asking a question where the only answer was ‘yes’; just like Mommy. Susie felt two fingers brush against the small of her back as the back of her diaper was pulled back and looked inside. “Okay. Not poopy. You’re good for a little while yet.” Susie startled a bit and squeezed Flopsy as the elastic on her faux panties snapped the diaper back in place. That was going to take some getting used to.

Kelsey and Dakota were waiting for her on the playground a few seconds later. “I thought you were getting cleaned up?” Kelsey half-asked as Susie waddled up into earshot.

The little girl shrugged. “I passed. I wasn’t poopy or nothin’.” The pacifier dropped back out of Dakota’s mouth, dangling from the ribbon on her onesie once more. Kelsey was equally slack jawed. “What?” Susie asked. “I thought we said that clean diaper rule was dumb.”

“Yeah,” Dakota said. “When the adult won’t LET you get changed!”

“It’s not like I’m poopy.” The other girls looked away, clearly embarrassed. Too late, Susie realized what she’d said might have come across as hurtful. “Oh no,” she said. “I didn’t mean it like that. I just...I just...”

An accusatory finger cut Susie off. “You’re losing it, girl! Do you wanna turn into...into...that?!”

Susie followed the line of Dakota’s digit. It wasn’t pointing to her after all. Instead, just over her left shoulder, was Alice. The dark haired girl was toddling around the playground, heading from the sandbox to a set of nautical themed spring riders, all sized for full grown adults, of course. There was a shark, a whale, a dolphin, and of course, a seahorse. Back over at the sandbox, a forever baby girl was whimpering and scratching at her crotch; sand pouring out of the leg holes of her diaper. Susie didn’t know Alice from her past life, but she suspected this behavior was typical.

Susie shrugged. “What’s your point? You’re not much better.”

“Wanna bet?”

Just then, the annoying Forbie stopped in her tracks and began rubbing her tummy a bit as she widened her stance. The girl looked thoughtful for a second, like she was on the verge of a life altering revelation. Faintly, Susie wondered if maybe there were more than just the three of them that really knew how screwed up the world now was. Alice disabused her of that notion a second later when she popped her thumb into her mouth. Knees slightly bent, her free hand on

her left knee; Alice leaned forward and stuck her backside out. In another lifetime, Susie might have assumed that Alice was doing some kind of impromptu dance move; like a slow motion twerk, only with less rhythm and far less sex appeal. The dopey grin on the girl's face and the expanding backside of her pants indicated otherwise.

As if reading her thoughts, Flopsy said, "You don't think you're going to end up like THAT, do you?"

A new round of revulsion gnawed at the base of Susie's skull, as she stared at Alice. Her load deposited firmly in the back seat of her disposable panties, Alice calmly stood up and finished her journey towards the spring riders. Easily, and without hesitation, she threw her leg over the shark, and sat down on it, not even flinching as the lump in her diaper was spread and smeared into obfuscation. "God, I hope not," Susie whispered.

"Yeah," Dakota called out, regaining Susie's attention. "My point exactly. I might be a b-word, but everything else about Alice...that's you."

"You're the one who was suckin' on her binkie."

Kelsey smirked, despite herself. "She's got you there."

"You can barely color, b-word! You don't even know what colors are!" Dakota snarled. For all they'd learned, they were back to bickering at each other. Some friends they were turning out to be.

The shorter girl flexed her fingers like a cat testing her claws. "It's like I've been TRYING to say. We're losing stuff! Whatever magic or whatever it was from that star is doing this to us!"

Again, their gaze came back to Susie. "It's not my fault!" Susie objected. "It's all of our fault. If you weren't a part of this, we wouldn't be talking to each other. It'd just be me and Flopsy, and you too would be dumb happy forever babies. So can we please try to be grown-up about this?"

"Would you listen to yourself?!" Dakota screamed. "Grown-up? I haven't heard you say the word 'adult' lately."

"I can say...'adult'." It didn't sound right though. It was like speaking a foreign language, all of the syllables were there but something in the pronunciation or tone was off. All the components without the understanding.

"I thought something was wrong," Kelsey said. "I think we're regressing, and it's only gotten worse since we've remembered what happened. We're losing parts of ourselves. We're catching up to the rest of the world, including calling the adults 'grown-ups'."

Dakota looked down at Kelsey condescendingly. "Yeah, cuz talking about 'the adults' like we're not is so much better."

Kelsey looked to Dakota. "You haven't been cursing as much since snack time."

"What are you talking about you little c-word?" The smug look from Kelsey was enough to send her fumbling for her pacifier again.

"Heh," Kelsey giggled, "thought so. I bet you can't even say va...vaj..." she stumbled.

"Hoo-hoo? Oh crud."

"They ARE getting littler," Flopsy noticed. "They're too busy getting angry with you to notice it in themselves."

"Yeah," Susan replied, "but to be fair, how would you know if you were getting dumber and littler?"

"You wouldn't," Flopsy said.

"I guess not."

"Uh...Susan?" Kelsey asked. "Who are you talking to?"

"I'm talking to..." Susie stopped. "Oh..."

She dropped the rabbit to the ground.

## 2.

### Kelsey

Another spoonful of yogurt came tilting towards Kelsey's mouth. For the sixth or seventh time, she'd stopped counting, she opened wide and accepted the goopy stuff. There might be one more spoonful of yogurt left until she'd have to wait for the cinnamon applesauce. To her left and right respectively, were Susan and Dakota, each of them taking turns being spoon fed by daycare workers.

There were probably close to a dozen forever babies in the kitchen area, all having their turn being spoon fed in unnecessary highchairs. At the foot of each humongous plastic and steel restraint device, little bits of spilled goop littered the ground: Spaghetti-O's. Apple Sauce. Macaroni. Pureed mush. Anything and everything that could be scooped up and spoon fed into a human mouth.

What must have once been a pristine shiny white tile floor, was now dulled and stained with the multitude of a thousand little spills over the course of the last two decades. This stood out to Kelsey, but likely no one else; certainly not the Forbies, or their caregivers. The strange shift in reality brought on by their decades old child wish bearing fruit was sudden only to the three girls who had made it. To everyone else, this was how things had always been, a slow creep and crawl of perpetual infancy.

And though this was yet another degrading and humiliating limitation placed on her adulthood; and a bizarre distortion of her proclivities, (former proclivities, she promised herself; she wouldn't so much as look at a cartoon if she got out of this mess) to everyone else, it was just lunch.

Outside the kitchen where forever babies were being fed in highchairs, other twenty-something babies sat on adult laps and nursed from bottles, greedily glugging down formula as their lips pulled on rubber nipples. A few were being led over to cubbies and taking out blankets for an after-meal nap.

"I don't get it," Kelsey said while the adult went to spoon some kind of glop into Dakota's waiting mouth. "None of this makes sense."

Susan hungrily eyed the half-empty jar of strained peas in front of her, waiting for the daycare worker to circle back to her. "It's magic. It doesn't hafta make sense."

"Not what I mean," Kelsey said. "The baby parts don't make any sense to me."

A bit of orange mush- likely sweet potato- squirted out of Dakota's mouth and onto her waiting bib. "Ha! Really? You're the second biggest baby here."

“Dakota...” Susan shot the blonde so-and-so a warning look. “It’s not too late for us ta leave you alone.” Then just as quickly, the girl opened her mouth wide, like a hatchling, so that semi-solid food could be spooned into her mouth. Kelsey shrunk down in her seat out of embarrassment for her (till now forgotten) friend. Clearly, Dakota’s crack about “second biggest baby” had gone over Susan’s head...or maybe it hadn’t. It was hard to tell.

Kelsey was losing things; they all were. Rationally, she knew this, even if she couldn’t put her finger on what was being lost; but she was gaining other things as well. Specifically, old, happy memories from long ago were resurfacing with each spoonful of baby food forced into her.

Little Susie had always been the leader of their little toddler clique back in the daycare days. She wasn’t necessarily the queen-bee type whom the other girls hung on her every word, but she had typically been the one to take the first step in anything.

Vaguely, she recalled a half-remembered incident a few weeks after that fateful wish. Susie had been the first to go into Pull-Ups, too. She’d started potty training before their little group broke up.

Even now that they were all together, flashes of good old Susie were showing in Susan’s personality. She’d been the one to recognize that the three of them had this awareness of their current plight in common and had brought them back together; she’d kept the peace between the three of them; she’d led the room trashing, and now she was leading the charge backwards into perpetual infancy.

That shouldn’t be particularly surprising, though, Kelsey thought as a spoonful of cinnamon applesauce, the flavors dancing on her tongue, made its way to the back of her throat. People changed as they grew up, but the years added to the definition of a person, not took away from them. So maybe Susan had always been Susie. Maybe Susan at twenty-two wasn’t that different from Susie at two...not where it really mattered.

She swallowed. “The problem isn’t that we’re being treated like babies, it’s that we’re being treated like different kinds of babies, all at once.”

Dakota accepted another spoonful of mush and swallowed. “That sounds racist.”

“Dakota...”

The ex-psych major piped in so she could make her point. “The levels of development are all over the place. We were two when this wish happened. Two-year-olds don’t need to be spoon fed mush.”

“Babies do,” Susie offered. “We wished to be babies, not two-year-olds.”

“Are you three still playing that silly grown-up game?” The adult feeding them asked.

Dakota pouted out her lip and made big puppy dog eyes. “Yes ma’am. We were just having oh so much fun, we didn’t want to stop. It’s fun pretendin’ to be grown-ups in diapers.”

Their jailer chuckled. “Okay okay. Just make sure you grown-ups in diapers all go down for your naps after lunch, okay?”

The ex-gold digger flashed a smile that would have made Shirley temple gag at the cuteness. “Okie dokie.” Dakota took another spoonful and then flashed a knowing wink and a devious grin at the others.

The thing of it was, it wasn’t that odd that they were talking so openly, Kelsey noticed. Across the kitchen a couple of boys in onesies were discussing how they were dinosaur spacemen between gobs of mashed potatoes. They were talking with the same gravity that Kelsey and her friends were discussing being trapped as they were. Alice walked by the kitchen, nap blanket in tow, yammering on about cartoons to an attentive adult who wasn’t listening as much as she was saying “Mmmhmm,” every time Alice paused for breath.

That’s how this new reality was: Everyone thought of them as babies. Babies said silly stuff. Ergo, their captors wouldn’t give much credence or import to anything that the three (hopefully not) forever babies said to each other. Dakota had been the one to pick up on that and use it to their advantage. She might be a manipulative, emotionally stunted witch, but her natural aptitudes were certainly coming in handy.

The thought about Dakota; how she’d wanted to claw her eyes out when they’d first met; made Kelsey sad. What the heck had happened to her over the last twenty years? The first time the three of them were all in daycare, she was easily the nicest girl you’d ever met: Thoughtful, sweet, empathetic, compassionate. As close as the adult Susan was to her child-self, Dakota was miles away from who she used to be. She was angry, snarky, a complete b-word and c-word and all the nasty words rolled up into one.

Still...whenever the girls had wanted something from their caregivers, they had always nominated sweet little Dakota to be their spokeswoman. Dakota always had a way with people. Some things never changed.

A series of muffled farts caused Kelsey to whip her head around the other direction. Susan was leaning forward in her highchair, her bum lifted ever so slightly. The girl’s face was warped silly putty; her eyes scrunched shut while her cheeks puffed out; her lips buzzed like an open balloon as far too similar noises came out the back of her. Her hands gripped the light beige tray of her highchair.

“What’s the matter Susan?” The daycare worker asked.

The unofficial leader of their little group shuddered noticeably and her lips curled back. "Makin'...poopy." The farting sounds stopped, and Susan's face slackened a bit, but her behind remained lifted in the air; her eyes still closed.

"Fight it," Kelsey heard herself whispering. "Fight it." But the fight was over. As quickly as it began, it ended. Kelsey watched as the back of Susan's panties puffed out a bit as the grunting stopped. Then the other girl opened her eyes, sighed audibly, and then plopped her butt back down into the seat of her oversized highchair. Breathlessly she mouthed a single word.

"Done."

"Did you just make some room in your tummy?" The adult cooed at Susie. "Did you?" Susie nodded sheepishly, not like a mortified young woman who had just publicly soiled herself, but like a baby girl who was just soaking in all the extra attention. She was even smiling, Kelsey noticed. Then, without even being prompted, Susie opened her mouth and hungrily accepted yet another spoonful of baby food.

Just the thought of still having an appetite after messing herself threatened to destroy what remained of Kelsey's appetite. How could Susie so easily debase herself and still eat? How could she smile? More importantly, was that going to happen to Kelsey? How far off was she from doing her business in her pants and then going back to playtime as if it didn't happen. How much longer before she was not only proudly announcing it, but also talking about it like it was nothing? How much more time did she have before she ended up like Susie?

The yogurt in Kelsey's stomach felt like it soured instantly, and the girl who would be a psychologist felt nauseous. A sour burp stuck in her throat, threatening to be the first wave of projectile vomit...though in this case it might just be written off as spit-up.

"Susan...Susie..."

"What's going on?" Dakota asked. The blonde girl was fidgeting in her seat, straining to see what was going on, with Kelsey acting as a barrier.

"Susan...Susie just..." Kelsey's words were cut off as she had to twist and turn her head to avoid the next spoonful coming for her mouth; applesauce smearing on her cheek. She had lost her appetite.

Susie interrupted. "You're overthinking it. Ya got too much smartness in ya." Baffled, Kelsey stopped to stare just long enough for a heaping spoonful of mashed apples and cinnamon to be whirled around and shoved into her mouth.

Forced to breathe through her nose as she swallowed, Kelsey inhaled through her nose, picking up the smell of the hot mess now resting in the back of her oldest friend's diaper. Involuntarily,

Kelsey's eyes drifted downward towards Susie's bottom. How was she not even squirming? The gunk felt like a rock sliding down her throat. "Whaddya mean?"

For an instant, the pure thoughtful adult clarity that had been uniquely Susan's flashed behind her thick glasses. "We made that wish when we was babies, not grownups. We weren't thinkin' about newborns an' crawlers and toddlers. So it all got mixed up." Susan started ticking items off on her fingers. "Babies drink from ba-bas, suck on pacis, eat in highchairs, sleep in cribs, and wear diapees." She dipped those same fingers into the jar of baby food on her tray and started to greedily lick and suck on her digits.

Welcome back Susie.

"So we're stuck in a two year old's version of babyhood." Dakota said while the teacher circled back around to Susie. "Makes sense to me. As much sense as anything else." There was a brief pause as Kelsey's diaper became a little warmer and a little bulkier. Thankfully no one seemed to notice. "Explains why I haven't seen any breastfeeding," Dakota went on, oblivious. "I didn't know about that till my little sister was born." Then she sniffed. "What's that smell?"

A green mush stained hand shot up in the air. "I pooped," Susie volunteered. Her hand was immediately snatched as a caretaker started wiping the flecks of strained pea off her palm with a moist towelette.

"Steve walks warily down the street with the brim pulled way down low." Dakota intoned.

Unphased by the poop in her pants, the stranger wordlessly wiping down her hands and face, or the blonde girl's sarcastic remarks, Susie looked Kelsey straight in the eye. "How come you're still so smart?"

"Because she's not a total baby...yet."

The former psych major ignored the ex-gold digger's comment. "I'm not that smart. I don't even know colors anymore."

"But you know diff'rent...diff'rent...baby stuff. I wouldn'ta thought of that."

"See previous comment," Dakota chimed in. Susie either ignored Dakota or didn't get the insult as she was handed a bottle of something white and milky. She held it with both hands and tilted her head back, chugging the stuff down. The smell from her diaper was getting worse, but she didn't seem to mind.

Next it was Kelsey's turn to have her face and hands wiped, whether she needed it or not. She squeaked as two fingers slid under the tray and into her diaper. "You're due for a change before naptime, too," the adult said. "But first have your bottle." Kelsey gingerly sucked on the rubber



nipple, afraid- perhaps irrationally so- that whatever was inside the bottle might speed along her backward progress.

“She’s got a point, though,” Dakota said, completely unfazed when it was her turn to be scrubbed down in her plastic prison chair. “You don’t know colors, but you know a lot of stuff about babies.”

“Maybe I was the smar...” Kelsey saw the challenge in Dakota’s eyes and thought better for the sake of diplomacy. “Maybe I learned more stuff and it’s taking longer to leak out.”

Dakota must have been dizzy from how much she was rolling her eyes, Kelsey thought. “Or maybe we’re just keeping the stuff that was...I dunno...a big part of us from back in the day.”

“I didn’t want to be a psycho-doctor back then.” Kelsey bit her tongue. Psycho-doctor? That wasn’t right, was it? It couldn’t be. It didn’t sound grown-up enough.

The last bottle was handed out, and Dakota took a swig from it like it was full of beer instead of formula. “But you were always kind of a know-it-all. And you always had a thing about kid and grown-up stuff.” The blonde so-and-so set down her bottle. “I remember you bawling your eyes out when Susie got into Pull-Ups, first.” She bawled up her fists and began rubbing her eyes in a mock pantomime of crying. “You kept saying ‘It’s over, it’s ooooooover’. We’re gettin’ toooooo biiiiig.” She put her hands down and took another swig. “No judgement, but as ‘smart’ as you are, you’ve always had issues. Knowing what I know now, I’m surprised you weren’t the first.”

The hiss of a rubber nipple gasping from air as it’s owner stopped sucking on it. “First what?”

“Nothin’ Susie. You just keep on drinking, sweetie.”

Another sour burp caught in Kelsey’s throat. “I am too smart. I was going to be a psycho-doctor one day.”

Dakota kept twiddling with her pacifier, nervously, as she all but inhaled the milky stuff in front of her. “How many doctor Seuss books are there?”

The curls in Kelsey’s head bobbed with excitement. “Forty-five,” she said, confidently. “More if you count the books that were published after his death or under a different name.” She sucked on the bottle confidently and took a breath. “And I can tell you about them all.”

“Can you count them?” It was Susie who asked this, her face curious and awestruck instead of challenging. “Can you count that tall?”

“Um...” Kelsey thought out loud. “One...? Two...? Kay...? Eeee...? Eill...?”

Once again, the adult who'd been feeding them burst into the conversation. "Honey, those last few were letters, not numbers. But I think you were starting to spell your name." A bit of milk dribbled out of the smallest girl's mouth as her teacher went to pinch her cheek just as she was having another sip from her bottle. "Such a clever baby."

Yet again, another revolting bubble made itself known. There was no more room in the back of her throat, so this one was lodged firmly and uncomfortably in her stomach.

"Hey poopy pants," Dakota called out. "What's two plus two?"

Susie finished her bottle and dropped it off the side of her tray. "Um...two plus two is...two two? Like the pretty frills ballerina's wear?" Then, as a kind of spoken punctuation, Susie let out a belch that rattled up from the back of her throat. Wordlessly, their caretaker bent over and picked up the bottle, laughing under her breath.

"Now what do you call two eggs on toast?"

"Adam and Eve on a raft," Susie said without hesitation. "Why?"

Dakota put her bottle down and quietly burped into her hand. "I think my point is proven." The brat was right. Kelsey hated to admit it, but she was right. "What I can't figure out is why isn't my little sister here with us."

Their caregiver intervened. "Your little sister? You mean Virginia?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's because she was too young..." the daycare lady paused. "She wasn't the right age. Only people in a certain age group are forever babies." Then cheerily she added. "Everybody else; older or younger; has to grow up."

"You mean gets to grow up," Kelsey sulked. She clutched her tummy, feeling more pain rise up in her. Something wasn't agreeing with her, and it wasn't just the rank smell coming from Susie's padded bottom.

"I didn't know you had a little sister," Susie said, leaning far over in her chair so she could look at Dakota. It did not help the stench.

"She wasn't born 'til after we split up." Dakota replied. Susie leaned back again, undoubtedly sending the mess everywhere, likely even towards her front. The thought made Kelsey want to wretch a little bit.

The tray slid out from in front of Kelsey. "I know that look," the teacher said. A worn white towel was draped carefully over one of the woman's shoulders. "Somebody needs burpies." At the word 'burpies', as if on autopilot, Kelsey's body lurched forward into the arms of the grown-up...the adult...teacher...whatever. Her legs wrapped around the woman's waist as an open hand started pounding her back.

"BLUUUURP!"

"Good girl!"

A bit of pressure left her gut. There was still more, however.

"UUUUUURH"

"Good girl!" Out of a sense of misguided courtesy, or maybe it was just habit, Kelsey found herself turned around as the woman burping her pivoted one hundred and eighty degrees. Now she could look both of her friends in the eye as she belched. Wonderful. Her weight was shifted forward briefly, and she felt a hand pat her backside. "Good thing you're wearing those plastic panties today, Kelsey. Otherwise you'd have leaked by now." Kelsey's face was pink enough to contrast nicely with the light blue Cinderella diaper cover she'd been dressed in this morning.

The other two didn't remark on this. Dakota looked like she was going to say something, but then shifted around in her seat and looked distinctly uncomfortable. None of them were dry, it appeared. Kelsey did her best to escape her own humiliation by burying her head in the bigger woman's shoulder.

"UUUUUURP!"

"Good girl! Just a couple more."

The obviously more regressed of the three picked up the conversation, not at all disturbed by Kelsey's current plight. "That's why your sister's not a Forbie like the rest of uuuu..." Susie stopped and a flash of Susan came back. "Like them. Wish didn't work on them cuz they didn't exist yet."

"Then how come the oldest babies here are only a little bit older than us?" Dakota demanded to know.

Kelsey couldn't help herself. "We were two. Did we really think anybody old enough to be in kindergarten as being 'like us'?" She followed with a large "ERRRRRRRP!"

"Good girl!" The world whirled around for a second, and Kelsey was plopped back into her highchair, a sodden squish punctuating the act as the tray was clicked back into place. "You

wait here, while I get everyone ready for naps.” The handful of daycare workers in the kitchen turned their backs on the three as they started to escort and carry other Forbies out of the kitchen.

Finally, they were alone.

The petit little girl rested her hands in her chin. “We’re stuck here because of a two-year-old’s wish.”

“Our two-year-old’s wish,” Susie corrected. She wriggled around in her seat a little bit, a hint of a smile creeping to her lips. “Is anybody else starting to think this is kinda comfy?”

“No.”

“No.”

“Oh...me neither. Just checkin’.”

A tired, defeated huff puffed itself out of Kelsey’s throat. “I never would’ve thought magic was real.”

“We did, though,” Susie said. “Back then.”

“I sure as heck believe it now,” Dakota said, though it was anything but triumphant. “Too bad we can’t wish again. I don’t want to spend another twenty years like this.”

Poor innocent Susie cocked her head to the side. “Why don’t we just wish on somethin’ else?”

Dakota scoffed. “Oh yeah? Like what? What else could we possibly wish on? You wish on stars. Everybody knows that. Even two-year-olds know that. What; you wanna wish on a tree or something?”

Wish on something else? The gears started turning in Kelsey’s head. Why not? Wishing trees might not be a thing...but what about...what about...? “THAT’S IT!” Kelsey shook with joy in her highchair. “I know how to fix this! I know where we can make a wish!”

### 3.

#### Dakota

It was like a train wreck, or a car crash, or a terrible circus accident involving hungry lions and fat clowns. Point being: Dakota just couldn't make herself look away. She and Kelsey sat on the floor, not ten feet away from the adult sized changing table, their legs forced apart by the sodden bulge in their diapers. On the changing table was Susie, and Dakota couldn't take her eyes off the girl. It was like watching a snuff film, but only the adult part of the girl was dying.

She watched with morbid fascination as the polka-dot panties were shimmied off of Susie's hips and off her legs, revealing her swollen, oversaturated diaper; shades of yellow and brown overpowering the once pristine white outer layer. The mean girl turned brat couldn't help but steal a glance between her own legs? Was her own diaper that ruined? More worrisome, when had she wet herself? She could have sworn that she'd been clean when the adult had strapped her into the highchair, yet the squish from squelching squish when she'd been set down on the floor was no mistake.

Looking back up to the changing table, Dakota saw Susie holding that dumb stuffed rabbit over her head, tilting it back and forth like she were making it fly; giggling too. Meanwhile, a complete stranger tended to the space between her legs.

The sound of ripping tapes caused Dakota to flinch. Kelsey, little bird that she was, jerked in surprise too.

Then the diaper was pulled forward, and Dakota spit out her paci for fear she might vomit on it. From front to back and even a bit on the sides, Susie was coated in her own mess. Even the daycare worker-who from her perspective had to have had plenty of years dealing with things like this-let out a guttural "Oof" and fanned her hand in front of her own face.

Susie just giggled and played with her bunny.

It was mesmerizing in a way: Susie by her dumb stuffie; the other two by the sight of her having poop wiped off her vagina.

Averting her gaze, Dakota's eyes darted down past her nose and towards her mouth. How did her paci get back in there? With great effort, she took the pacifier out of her mouth for what felt like the millionth time. "This is so weird."

"I know, right?" Kelsey whispered back. "And we're next. On the changing table, I mean."

Dakota gave a half-playful half-mocking nudge to her (until recently) rival. "Not that," she said. "I mean the stuff that's going on in my head. I didn't even know you this morning, and now I've got all these memories flooding into my head from before. Further back than most people

'member." She stared as the rest of the poop was scraped from Susie's most delicate parts, and then the daycare employee went to work closer to the point of origin. "It's not normal."

"Not used to empathy?" Kelsey asked.

Yes. But that's not what Dakota had been referring to. "It's memories...and feelings. Like, we were strangers this morning. We'd forgotten each other. And that's normal, right?" She didn't wait for an answer. "And even if we found out we used to be friends; that was twenty years ago. We should be like...I dunno...meeting each other for the first time all over again. But it's all fresh in my head like it all happened yesterday all of a sudden. It feels like we've always been best friends; like our whole friggin' grown-up lives never happened."

"More like they happened..." Kelsey paused. Dakota sincerely hoped it wasn't because she was doing something in her pants. "...but all those years happened here instead."

"Exactly!" Dakota almost screamed. Dumb little bird wasn't so dumb after all. "So, it's like I look up there," she gestured to the changing table where an absolutely vile diaper was being rolled up from beneath Susie and thrown into a nearby pail with an audible thump; "and I'm seeing two people. One of them is my best friend and this is perfectly normal and right. The other is my best friend and she shouldn't have to go through this kind of crazy." A hint of a sob threatened Dakota's composure. "A-a-and I don't want her to be my friend. I don't want YOU to be my friend...no offense..."

"None taken."

"It was just so much easier when I was surrounded by people I didn't care about. I could write them off as stupid, or crazy, or whatever. And now I'm remembering planting stuff in a garden with you...and feeding ducks at a park with her...and naptimes and sleepovers..."

"How old were we?"

"That's the thing. It's getting harder for me to tell." Dakota sniffed, and started twirling her pigtails around. Better to keep her hands busy. "As soon as Susie told us about the wish, it's like a switch got flipped on my head and stuff is getting edited while I'm not looking. When I think back to the wish we made I keep seeing us like we are now, not like we were then."

Kelsey looked distinctly disturbed. "Yeah...me too." She moved to give Dakota a hug. Dakota released one of her pigtails and held up a hand to stop her. They both turned and watched as a fresh diaper was unfolded and slid under their (almost forgotten) friend. A cloud of baby powder soon covered her bum and genitals. If Susie was bothered by any of it, she didn't signal anything.

"So if we're gonna get out of this, we gotta..."

"I know, I know," Dakota cut Kelsey off. "We gotta wish on something else. You think this wishing fountain at the college will really work?"

The front of the diaper was pulled up between Susie's legs and taped snugly around her hips. Susie was only now making things difficult by kicking at the air playfully while the daycare worker tried to work the polka-dot baby panties back over her legs.

"It's gotta work," Kelsey insisted. "It's how magic works. You believe hard enough, and it happens."

THAT rang a few bells. "How do you figure?"

Kelsey shrugged nonchalantly. "It's how it happened the first time."

"Yeah."

"Also, I read it in a book."

Despite herself, Dakota arched an eyebrow. "Yeah? Me too."

"Oh? Weird. Huh?"

"Not compared to this."

A loud rustling crinkle announced Susie's presence. Even though her diaper had been changed and was now considerably less bulky due to lack of use, Susie still had the same ungraceful waddle of a one year old still figuring out the finer points of locomotion. With surprising speed and no control, Susie plopped down on her padded rump. It was less of a controlled sit and more of a lucky fall cushioned by the diaper. "Hi guys, whatcha talkin' 'bout?"

Neither Dakota, nor Kelsey had time to answer before a pair of hands reached down and picked Kelsey up off the ground. Dakota saw Kelsey tremble. "I guess I'm next," Kelsey whimpered as she was taken.

Naturally, Susie was oblivious to her companions' discomfort. Whatever cosmic drug had entered their system, Susie was tripping balls on it. By comparison, Dakota and Kelsey were only getting a mild buzz; just enough so that they could function. "Hi Dakota."

Dakota slumped, her eyelids going to half mast to hide her contempt. "Hey Susie."

The new Forbie rolled over onto her back. "I think I like gettin' my diapee changed, now."

“You don’t say...”

“You get to smell nice and clean,” Susie went on. “And the powder feels really good. And the crinkle sounds nice. And it just moooves different than a wet diapee.” As she was counting off the merits of her new underwear, Susie kicked her legs in the air and started playing with her toes, giving each one a tiny pinch before moving onto the next one. Was she playing “this little piggy” with herself? Ugh. “And they’re kinda like undies but not. Like they can get covered up, but it’s okay if everybody sees ‘em. They’re cute too.”

Dakota inhaled deeply, the air going into her nostrils carried a deep sweet scent of fresh baby powder. It really did smell nice. Better than the faint odor of pee-pee that surrounded the ex-gold digger. Soon though, Dakota would get to smell pretty, like Susie. Dakota liked smelling pretty. That thought was a mistake, Dakota realized. “Stop it,” she said out loud. “Just stop.”

The forever baby that used to be her friend, rolled to her side, her legs plopping to the ground. She propped up her head on one hand and looked Dakota in the eye; her legs still splayed, unable to come completely together due to the large bulk between them.

“Whyyyyyyyyy?”

“You’re not supposed to be this way,” Dakota reminded her. “You’re supposed to be...I dunno...I’m guessing a boring but responsible grown-up.” Dakota wasn’t sure. Everything in the memory department was starting to align and tell her that yes, Susie was more or less acting the way she’d always acted, but common sense screamed otherwise. Just earlier this morning, the big dumb diaper butt in front of her was acting infinitely more like a grown-up. But that was Susan. Maybe Susie, as Dakota couldn’t help but think of her, was a completely different person; a baby in an adult’s body.

Would that happen to Dakota, she wondered? Would she just cease to exist and then some two year old (if that) copy of herself would just take permanent residence in her skull? “You’re not supposed to be this way.” She repeated.

The Forbie’s eyes fluttered, a random thought popping into her head. “Don’t I get ta decide how I’m s’posed to be?”

Dakota’s diaper was already wet enough that it was getting difficult to tell just how wet it was; but she wouldn’t have been surprised if she had just let another little spurt out in surprise. “But you didn’t,” she said. “The wish did.”

“But I made the wish,” Susie replied. “You said.” Her tone wasn’t accusatory or mocking. None of the bitterness that was making itself home in Dakota’s soul lingered in the other girl. “It was my wish a long time ago. But it was still what I wanted.”



Dakota shook her head, disgusted, but with what or whom she couldn't tell. "What did you want?"

"Not to be my Mommy."

The blonde girl blanched. "Wuh? That's kinda...dark."

Dakota's companion pushed herself up into a seating position, the crinkle of the diaper still audible in every move and little shift. "I don't hate my Mommy," she explained. "When I got biggerer, she just wanted me to be more like her," she took a breath, "And I just wanted to be...to be...me."

Years of self-training, of droning out countless boyfriends as they rambled on about whatever self-important nonsense they were rambling about, told Dakota that Susie wasn't done talking yet. "I used ta be a tomboy," Susie confessed. "I threw away all my pretty clothes and dollies because dressies and cutesy stuff is what Mommy wanted. I wanted different. It was fun rollin' round in the mud and playin' with the boys..." a slight blush came over Susie. "I think I'm gonna do that more later," she added "but now I get to be a girly-girl too."

Ten feet away on the changing table, Kelsey let loose a fresh gush of pee-pee just as her new diaper was being slid underneath her. The poor little bird buried her face in the palms of her hands while the grown-up sighed and began re-wiping her. "There's less difference 'tween boys and girls right now," Susie kept on rambling. "We all squish and stink and then get changed and smell pretty and like soft and squishy and fluffy things. So I can do both if I want to."

Flashes of Brendan's rejection of her for 'cooties' bubbled up to the surface. The slightest pang of heartbreak echoed inside of her. "I wouldn't bet on that. Boys suck." Shouldn't have said suck. Just the thought of it made her lips itch for her paci.

Susie frowned. "What happened to you?"

"I grew up."

"Yeeeeeeeah," Susie said. "That's not workin' on me. How'd you turn into such a...a...a...?"

"B-word?" Dakota offered, unable to say the actual swear word.

The other girl's eyes lit up. "Yeah! That's it! A brat! How'd you turn into a brat? You used to be so nice and cute."

"Till I wasn't..." Dakota mumbled a little too loudly. Crinkling all the way, Susie crawled over to Dakota and sat directly in front of her, like a puppy begging for attention. Darn it. Dakota wasn't getting out of this too easily. "I used to be the cute and precious one in my family," she

explained. "Then my little sister was born, and I wasn't the baby anymore. I was four. I couldn't out-cute her. So I found...other ways to get attention."

"Like bein' bratty?"

The brat pressed her finger to Susie's lips. "Don't interrupt. I'm only saying this because that grown-up can't figure out how to button up Kelsey's plastic pants. Long story short, I couldn't make people like me, but I figured out how to make people hate me. Then I figured how to make people fear me. Then puberty came and I figured out how to make people want me," she gestured to her body as if she needed no further explanation on that front. "And somewhere along the line, that became normal. I needed attention, I figured out how to get it...and yeah...attention is what I got."

"But you didn't get nothin' else, didja?" Susie observed. "Like love, or happiness or that other stuff that matters. You stopped bein' the baby, and you haven't been happy since."

Dakota slumped down again. "Yeah..." The other girl leaned in to give her a hug. This time Dakota didn't stop her. It felt nice.

"Look on the bright side," Susie said. "You get to be the baby again. At least for a little while."

A lightbulb went on over Dakota's head. "What do you mean 'a little while'?"

"When we unwish this wish."

Confused, Dakota asked, "You mean you like being a big baby but you're still going to help us?"

The newest forever baby scoffed. If it were possible for a giant infant to look well and truly offended, this is what it looked like. Susie said, "Of course I am!" For once in her life, Dakota was at a loss for words. Fortunately Susie had enough to spare. "I like bein' drunk too, but I don't wanna be drunk forever. And you guys are my bestest friends. I'd do anything for you."

Some long unrealized tension left Dakota's soul. She'd been assuming that Susie wouldn't be helping them from here on out. Maybe there was more than a little Susan left inside that baby brain. Over Susie's shoulder, Dakota made out the last of the poppers being snapped into place on Kelsey's diaper cover. "One thing that keeps bugging me," Dakota said in hurried tones. "We all wished on that star together and it changed the world. Don't we need to wish on that fountain together?"

"Yeah?" Susie nodded. "So?"

"In case you didn't notice," Dakota said, "we don't have our own cars."

Susie smirked. "So? We can fix that easy."

"How?"

"Oh Susan," a daycare worker called out, "Look who you left at the changing table." Kelsey was holding the grown-up's hand, looking ashamed of herself. In the other hand was-

"FLOPSY!"

The big baby reached out and clutched the stuffed bunny like it was her most prized possession. "Flopsy kept Kelsey company near the end while she was getting changed." Kelsey's face almost beat her padded bottom to the floor as she retook her seat next to the others.

Looking up at the grown-up standing above them staring down expectantly, Dakota knew it was her turn next. She couldn't though, she just couldn't. She didn't know what brilliant idea Susie had to get them all to Kelsey's wishing fountain at the college. The rational part of her brain told her she could just bring it up again after she got changed, but the fearful paranoid part of her brain panicked that Susan's mind would drift off again into full blown Susie territory. "I'm not ready to get changed, yet!" Dakota blurted out.

"Oh?" The grown-up asked. "Why not?"

How to stall? How to stall? Thinking quickly, Dakota rolled over onto all fours. "I'm...pooping?" The grown-up leaned back from trying to pull the ex-gold digger to her feet. Dakota looked to Susie. "How do we get to the fountain?"

Susie giggled. "We get our Mommies and Daddies to take us."

A fart escaped the blonde bimbo baby. If she could have slapped her own forehead without losing her balance, she would have. Kelsey asked the question for their indisposed colleague: "Why would they take us?"

Their regressed friend scoffed. "Cuz we asked 'em to. We're cuties now. And friends."

"That doesn't mean..." Dakota started, then stopped. Uh-oh. This bluff was becoming more than a bluff.

"...That doesn't mean they are," Kelsey finished.

A sly, almost Cheshire cat smile crept across Susie's mouth. "We're best friends now, remember? Betcha we've done sleepovers a million times. They know each other."

“Sleepover,” Dakota grunted.

Kelsey started connecting the dots. “We do a sleepover with the fountain as a meeting spot for pickup...”

Dakota finished, “We can make...our wish.” She finished more than just the sentence. For the second time that day, the back of her diaper was filled. For the first time that day, she actually felt a sense of relief come with it. “Okay...” she panted, looking back up at the patiently waiting grown-up. “I’m ready. Change me.”

## CHAPTER 7

Friends,

*I'll restate my question: What can defeat magic, this reality bending yet fundamental force of the cosmos? What can possibly contend with something that makes wonders by working one's will? The wise magician will say "nothing". Now don't bother skipping back a few chapters and double checking to see if I have made a typo of some sort. I haven't.*

*A wise magician and a foolish magician will give the same answer. "Nothing" beats magic, both the wise and the foolish will agree. However, the difference between a wise magician and a foolish one is how each one takes the meaning of the word "nothing".*

*To a fool, "nothing" means that there isn't anything imaginable in the human experience that can counter magic. To a sage, "nothing" means that magic can be countered by lack of imagination. I refer you to the Myth of the Cave, friends. Plato paints a world for us where people are born chained to a wall and only have shadows cast by torchlight to define their little world. If someone were to miraculously escape the cave and see the sunlight and the green grass and the wonderful world outside the cave; their mind would be positively boggled. They wouldn't have the vocabulary for what they saw; vibrant colors such as white and green and blue and yellow would be incomprehensible to them. To put this poor cave dweller in an even bigger pickle, if he did return to the cave, no one would believe him because the people in the cave would have no context or schema in which to understand the ramblings of what for all intents and purposes was either a madman or a liar.*

*But the stories of this fantastical world filled with indescribable colors with no ceiling and cold air that moved on its own would stay with the people who heard it, and from there, a very rough and primitive imaginary picture of the world outside the cave would form in the imaginations of others.*

*We, dear friends, are all in the cave, just waiting to get out.*

*Yet I still haven't answered that one nagging question: How did we get into this cave? If we had magic, how did we lose it? The answer is once again, stunningly simple. Magic gives you what you want. So someone wanted a world without magic.*

*None of my research- historical or metaphysical- even remotely suggests anything else. Nor does it suggest that this was a particularly malign or even purposeful erasure. If magic gives you what you want, it is very possible to believe that enough people got it and used magic to create a kind of paradise for themselves.*

*Don't laugh. You've read this far. Maybe the Garden of Eden was a real place and we were all Adam and Eve at one time because that's how we wrote ourselves into it. The thing is, in a world where there is no unmet need or desire; magic isn't needed. Just as generations of*

*Plato's hypothetical cave people forgot what the sun was for not having seen it in so long, we forgot what magic was because we used it to create a world where it wasn't needed.*

*But because we're all human, we somehow managed to muck it all up again, we always do. And that's why we have stories of magic throughout the ages. We want something bad enough, we let ourselves have it. Afterwards we either don't need magic any further or don't want it or can't bear on some level to let ourselves have it. And thus we forget that we ever had magic to begin with, and relegate it back to fantasy and we're again chained to the here and now instead of the what could be or what could be again.*

*-An excerpt from "Do You Believe In Magic?" By Cornelius Crowley.*

1.

## **Dakota**

"Pony Girl, Pony Girl, won't you be my Pony Girl?

Don't say no. Here we go off across the plains.

Marry me, carry me right away with you.

Giddy up, giddy up, giddy up, whoa! My Pony Girl."

Her father's words were done with a kind of robotic sing-song-not-quite monotone; like reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at school, or remembering alphabetical order by quickly saying the ABC's. (Crud! Now that Dakota thought of it, she wasn't actually sure she actually remembered how to do either of those things.) The words were being said, but it was all rhythmic cadence and no real intonation. No feeling.

Such was life for the time being. And such was childhood as Dakota remembered it.

The rest of the afternoon at the Big Little Daycare had passed by uneventfully, enough. Nap times, afternoon play, and of course plenty of diaper checks and a change or two all around for Dakota and her new-old friends. They'd made their plans to dupe their parents into taking them to (what had gosh darn better be) a wishing fountain. Lacking anything else to talk about or do (especially Susie), they'd spent their last few hours together acting like "normal" kids their age: Blocks. Tea Parties with stuffies. The works.

There hadn't been any point in doing much else. There was only so much planning they could do, so they might as well enjoy what they could before they rolled the dice in their attempt to unwish everything back to normal (and not wait two decades to get results).

It was worrisome, but the former Queen Bee hadn't been particularly worried at that point. Had she worried she'd only have suffered twice. Also, the marble run they'd built together had been fun. Ugh. How much of that was the real her and how much of that was the ever expanding Forbie brain talking? It didn't matter. Soon she'd be back to tight skirts instead of snug padding. It'd be nice to have underwear that only peeked out of her clothes when she wanted it to. Heck it'd be nice to have a pair of panties that she could wear more than once. Little

thoughts like that is what kept Dakota going and assured that she was still at least somewhat in her right mind.

At the moment though, she was having trouble getting her father's attention so she COULD spring her plan of a meetup with her "little friends" at the wishing fountain by the old college. Considering she was straddling his leg and bobbing up and down every few seconds, it was considerably harder to get a word in edgewise, than might be expected. Normally when she was straddling a man, she had all the attention she wanted. Daddy was in his own little world though. Diaper (thankfully) crinkling beneath her, Dakota bounced on her Daddy's knee for what seemed like the bajillionth time. Dakota may have just lost count, or perhaps even lost the ability to count, but at this point she didn't much care. She just wanted it to end.

"Daaaaaaddy," she whined, bobbing up and down on her father's knee. "stoooooop!" Her father stopped looking over her shoulder at the pro-wrestling match on T.V. long enough to give a polite but condescending, "Whatever you say, sweetie" before sliding her off his knee and onto the living room floor. His gaze only lasted long enough to make sure that she was sitting safely on the old carpet, then darted back up to two muscle-heads pretending to beat the snot out of each other.

This wouldn't do. However briefly, she rose to her feet and looked her father in the eye. "You're blocking Daddy's view, Sweetie." Dakota soon found herself being repositioned to the side, before losing her balance and tumbling to the floor again.

The thunderous crash of an oiled up steroid freak in tights falling to the mat was an almost comical parallel as Dakota fell back onto her padded rump. The "oooooh's" of the televised audience didn't make things feel any better. Darn it! How was she supposed to maintain her balance when her own underwear kept throwing off her gait?

And of course it was the diaper throwing off her balance; none of the other Forbies had lost their ability to walk. (OMG! Did she just think "other" Forbies?" No! No! Cut that out!) Daddy looked down at her from his spot on the couch. "Oopsie. Sorry about that, Dakota. You okay?" A quick glance confirmed that she was, and his eyes were glued back to the T.V. before she could even answer for herself. (Not that he expected an answer.)

Ugh. He was like this when she was growing up (the first time), too. Her father's worldview came from a "simpler" time, wherein the man of the house earned the money, paid most of the bills, and when he came home, he expected to be able to unwind and play "king of the castle".

He hadn't been a bad caregiver by any definition: Dakota had never gone hungry a day in her life, or lacked clean clothes that fit her. And when he put his mind to it, he was a doting father who would lavish gifts and treats on his two daughters. But one could NOT interrupt him during his show. It wasn't even a warning, it was just fact. He just sort of went on autopilot, focused more on wrestling and whatever kooky sitcom was on T.V. that night.

Mom had taken care of most of the parental heavy lifting at night; but when she'd died when Dakota was twelve, Dad never really adapted. Teenage Dakota didn't mind this not-new-and-improved parent. Permission slips and teacher's notes were easy to get signed with minimal discussion (or reading on Daddy's part) and he (almost) never noticed when she'd snuck out. Trapped-in-diapers-Dakota (she was NOT a Forbie) had more problems with this arrangement. Daddy's poor short term memory and attention span was a boon when she'd had independence. Now it was definitely a hindrance.

Disgustedly, Dakota took in the living room she hadn't seen in over four years. Same old little pink house built on the cheap by the construction company Daddy was the foreman for. Same old wallpaper. Same old carpet. The only new thing was the big screen T.V. in the living room. The giant crib and baby stuff was certainly new to Dakota, but none of it was "new new". Same old Daddy: He'd splurge, but he didn't like to shop.

Kind of a shame that he hadn't remarried, actually. It was surprising, considering the altered timeline. Dakota would've thought that her father would have been at least pragmatic enough to look for a new "Mommy" to take care of a perpetual infant.

"Hey Daddy," a voice that was startlingly similar to her own said. From her spot on the floor, Dakota looked up and saw Virginia. It was like looking into her own past. Virginia was every bit the man-eater sex-kitten that Dakota had been a few years ago. Dakota had done better, of course, and Virginia looked like a straw haired hussy in her denim skirt and fishnets; but some boys were into that. A wish-free lifetime ago, Dakota would've just assumed that Virginia was being a good little sister and trying to live up to perfection, but that didn't seem likely given the circumstances.

Maybe it just ran in the family. "Hey Virginia," Dad said, not looking up.

"I'm off," Dakota's little sister said.

"Where to?"

"Date night."

The wrestling show went to commercial. Dad's eyes finally came into focus and he looked directly at his youngest daughter. "Got everything ready for me?"

Virginia nodded. "Mmmhmmm. Bottles are in the fridge and chicken nuggets for both of you are in the oven with the timer on." Dakota found her personal space being casually violated as her own sister stuck two fingers inside the leg holes of her diaper. "She's dry." Virginia sniffed. "I don't think she needs a bath tonight, so if you put her to bed right after dinner, the diaper will hold till tomorrow."



“Kay. Thanks hon. You’re such a good big sister.” Then Daddy added, “And daughter. Just be back by ten.”

“Awww, thanks Daddy.” She gave her old man a kiss on the forehead. “Don’t worry. I’ll be good. I’ll try not to wake you when I come home...at ten.” Dakota knew that move and had used it too many times to count, (as if she could count just now). Virginia wasn’t going to be home by ten. But if Virginia was the new Dakota, her antics were a definite blind spot for the old man. “G’night sis. Be good.” Dakota’s hair was gently ruffled, and then Virginia was out the door.

Dad sighed and sunk back into the sofa, waiting for the commercials to be over. Great. Dakota was stuck as a baby to a largely clueless dad and her sister was the de facto caregiver AND acting just like Dakota had been.

Oh...oh! The most disturbing thought invaded her brain. Dakota had learned to manipulate and gain attention to deal with no longer being the “baby” of the family. Was that why Virginia was turning out like this; because she never got to be the baby? Had Dakota indirectly caused this? Did that mean that Virginia would soon run off for a life of leeching off of stupid rich boys?

Dakota couldn’t help but wonder what would happen if and when Virginia left them. Daddy could barely change a diaper or plan a meal. If this wish thing went further South, she’d HAVE to make sure that her father met someone to act as a surrogate mother. Pooping her pants on the regular was bad enough. Having to sit in it until a commercial came on would be unacceptable. (No, no, no! Do NOT plan for defeat!) Enough of the loser talk. Dakota made an effort to pout her lip and give herself those trademark baby doll eyes. “Daddy?” Dakota said from her spot on the floor.

The commercials were still on, so she could be spared a moment “Yeah, baby? You hungry? Want a baba?”

Dakota made an effort to giggle, and play cute. “No...? I was just thinking...?” She made sure to add the unspoken question at the end. If she was just supposed to be a dumb baby, she might as well play up the part. Puppies and kittens (and babies) were dumb, but the cuteness offset it.

“Bout what, sugar?”

The blonde former bombshell touched her bottom lip. “Could I maybe have a sleepover?”

The reply was immediate: “I don’t think so honey. You’re a little too...” Daddy caught himself, “it’s just that...sleepovers are a lot of work.” Darn it. Of course she couldn’t have the sleepover at her house.

“Oh I didn’t mean here,” Dakota said. “I meant having one at one of my friends’ house.” She hoped she wasn’t lying, but it was hard to say. When Susie had volunteered to host the slumber party, it had seemed like a good idea at the time. Being a giant (and therefore more innocent seeming) baby was becoming more natural to Susie, so it seemed reasonable to assume the girl could convince her mom to host. The hindsight of a couple of hours had allowed doubt to creep into Dakota’s brain. What if Susie just completely forgot the plan? “We was talkin’ ‘bout it at Daycare today.” (And where was that darn phone call, Susie?! Ugh. If you wanted something done right...)

Daddy seemed to consider this, and Dakota gave her best pouty face. Come to think of it, it didn’t matter whose house they were at; if the wishing thing worked (and it better work), the sleepover would be canceled, anyways; replaced by a round of grown-up drinks.

“Hmmm...” Daddy seemed to be mulling it over. “A night to...a night with your friends. Which ones?”

“Kelsey and Susie.”

“Remind me where they live?” Great. He was taking driving distance into account.

A jolt of panic made Dakota blurt out, “We could meet at the wishin’ fountain!”

“Wishing fountain?”

“UM...the one at the college?” Darn it. She felt so stupid for calling it a ‘wishin’ fountain’. She was even starting to think like a baby. Thinking like a baby got them into this mess though, so maybe it’d get them out.

“The College, huh? That’s not too far.”

“Nope, nope, nope,” Dakota wagged her head comically. She had to seem enthused but not desperate. “Not too far at all!” (Please let this work please let this work!) Just as Daddy was about to give in, the wrestling, came back on, causing his eyes to glaze over. (AAAAAAGH!) Dakota might’ve started crying in frustration, if not for the blaring jangling noise coming from the kitchen. The oven? No. She watched as Daddy got up and jogged towards the ringing. “At this hour?” he muttered. It was the phone, she realized.

“Hello?” Daddy said picking up the receiver in the kitchen.

2.

**Kelsey**

From her spot on the floor, images and sounds from the television flooded Kelsey's grey matter, each one making an indelible impression on her the second she registered it.

Talking heads and a picture of an old guy in a suit and tie sitting at a fancy desk. "Congress's joint Medicare expansion bill was signed into law by President McLellan-"

TSSSSSSSSSS!

A silver haired couple pushing a twenty something baby man in shortalls around in a stroller; the sunshine beaming down on the trio as if from Heaven. "-planning retirement, but worried about your forever baby? Unified Mutua-"

TSSSSSSSSSS!

More talking heads and words, Kelsey realized, scrolled across the screen; though she couldn't read them. Pictures behind the talking head showed countries on a map.

Heaven help her, she couldn't recognize any of them, but she was pretty sure it wasn't America. "-peace talks continue in-"

TSSSSSSSSSS!

A girl about her age laying on the floor and giggling lightly. An actress, presumably her mother, taping up the girl's diaper with a contented smile on her face.. "-from Proctor & Gamble, comes new Coddles. Because your little one might not be so little, but they'll always be your ba-"

TSSSSSSSSSS!

Another talking head. This one blonder and with more makeup on. "In entertainment news, ratings and controversy follow the inclusion of television's first 'forever baby' character; Sassy." Side by side pictures of the same red head, one in a pink romper sucking on a paci, the other in a tight blue dress on some red carpet flashed in the corner of the screen. "Portrayed by Skyler Jansen, who is twenty-six and therefore was not actually affected by the phenom-"

TSSSSSSSSSS!

Shots of a college campus, not unlike Kelsey's old stomping grounds. "Colleges prepare for mass enrollment as more and more of what sociologists are referring to as 'old souls' reach high school graduation age.

TSSSSSSSSSS!

A crowded park with two forever babies, a girl and a boy, in nothing but pink and red t-shirts and matching puffy white diapers running around; idiot smiles adorning their faces. “Introducing Snuggles, the Forbie shaped diap-“

TSSSSSSSSSS!

Good ol’ Bugs Bunny. His face staring down the barrel of Elmer Fudd’s shotgun. “Ehhhhh, what’s up, Doc?” Something was off about the color, it wasn’t as faded or grainy. The animation was crisper and cleaner. Was this a new one?

TSSSSSSSSSSSS!

“Pookie,” her father interrupted her channel surfing. “That’s Bugs Bunny! You love Bugs Bunny!” Dang...he was right. She really did love Bugs Bunny. Her fingers moved back over the remote to the down channel button.

TSSSSSSSSSSSS!

Now, Lola Bunny was in on the act, pretending that she was also Elmer Fudd and using crazy cartoon logic and a fake ID to convince the genuine article that he had been re-cast; gotta love those fourth wall breaks. And just like the last time Kelsey saw this, just as Elmer walked off screen, dragging his shotgun behind him saying “I’ve gotta go tawk to my agent”, Lola got a little too in on the act and started hunting Bugs.

Kid at heart that he was, Daddy started chuckling, his Santa belly jiggling a half second after he’d stopped to take a breath. “I love this one.”

Kelsey stifled a giggle too, and looked up at her father. “Me too. Even if it is a rerun.” The record in the back of Kelsey’s brain scratched. Re-runs? This wasn’t a rerun. Or at least not one that Kelsey could remember having seen. And yet, Kelsey wasn’t at all surprised when Elmer showed up in drag in the next beat, insisting that he was Lola. She had been re-cast too. And just like a toddler reacting to the jack popping out of the box, Kelsey couldn’t help but laugh at the joke she instinctively saw coming.

This was bad.

This was really bad.

She had been stuck in a warped version of her own fantasy for a little under two days, or so she hoped, and had already lost she had no idea how many basic skills. It was like every time she filled her pants, more than just pee-pee and poopy left her; but the stuff that had made her a big

kid was drained away too. And in that space, new, more babyish stuff filled her up. Could memories be included in that too?

“Daddy?”

“Yes, Pookie?”

“Who’s President?”

“President James McLellan,” Daddy said, rattling it off as if it were the color of the sky. McLellan? That didn’t sound right. Kelsey couldn’t say what the right answer had been, but McLellan didn’t seem like it was the one. Was McLellan the president when she was a baby the first time around? She didn’t know then, and she didn’t know now. How was she supposed to unwish this reality if she couldn’t remember how the old one had been?

“Why do you want to know?”

“Talkin’ about it at Daycare,” Kelsey lied and instantly felt a pang of guilt. She hated lying to her parents, but knew they wouldn’t believe the truth. She had to know more. A sinking feeling in the pit of her soul told her that more had changed than just her diapers.

Speaking of which...

“Mommy,” Kelsey pivoted on her bum to look at her mother. “How do you and Daddy pay for my diapees? Aren’t they ‘spensive?” They had to be. Kelsey had seen the boxes of diapers in her room and at the daycare. A single box could only hold a couple hundred at most.

“They used to be,” Mommy said, “but then rules were passed to help families like us. Our insurance helps a lot with stuff like that. Medicine and doctor’s visits too.”

The shrink-to-be couldn’t help herself. “Whhhhhyyyyyy?”

Daddy explained, “When people realized that a whole bunch of babies like you would never grow up all over the world, they passed new rules to help those babies and their families stay healthy without having to go hungry or poor.”

“And everyone else,” Mommy added. A concerned frown flashed across her features. “Is that why you were saying you were potty trained? Were you worried we’d run out of diapers or that you were hurting us?”

“Nuh-uh...” Kelsey said. “Just...I don’t know.” The blurb from the T.V. about ‘peace talks’ buzzed in the big-girl part of her brain. Something was strange about that and the places on the

map she'd seen while desperately searching for info via channel surfing. Something was wrong with this picture, but she couldn't think of the right words. "What's war?"

Daddy and Mommy looked at each other. Mommy shrugged. "War is when two countries don't like each other and so they get into a big fight and try to hurt each other."

"But there's a lot less of it these days," Daddy said.

Again. "Whhhhhhyyy?" Darn it felt good to say that!

"It's harder for people to fight each other when they have to take care of a whole bunch of babies who'll never grow up," Daddy said.

Mommy shimmied herself down to the carpet and gave Kelsey a hug. "And there are plenty of Mommy's and Daddy's who would rather take care of their widdle ones then send them off to war."

Kelsey gasped. "So people are talking more instead of fighting," she asked, "because of me?"

"You and all the other Forbies, Pookie."

There was a certain twisted logic in all of this: If everyone within two years of her had turned into a giant baby, that'd mean a lot of different changes. There'd have to be more diapees and daycares. More babies to take care of who would never turn into soldiers to fight. Maybe even who got elected president would change because of all of that. She wasn't sure what the world had been like before a few days ago, but the big-girl part of her brain told her it was nothing like this.

Had she accidentally made world peace AND a kind of universal healthcare AND new Bugs Bunny cartoons? It was a stupid, silly, impractical idea; but so was a wish made by a two-year old coming true in the real world.

If everything went according to plan, was she willing to reverse all that just so that she could do all the little kid stuff she liked AND sit on the big-girl potty? Was she willing to sacrifice all of that just so she could wipe her own hiney?

Still on the floor, her eyes looked down between her legs as the warmth in her diaper snuck up on her yet again. What was she losing this time? It was a small price to pay, wasn't it? Her eyes danced slightly up to the cabinet beneath their T.V. She couldn't read what was on the spines of the little DVD cases, but somehow she knew what was in them. "Home movies?"

“You wanna watch, Kelsey?” Mom asked beside her. Kelsey didn’t even have to respond before her mother was leaning forward and grabbing one of the cases. “How about your last birthday party?”

Last birthday party? Yeah. That was as good a place to start as any. She hadn’t had a birthday party since before she’d left home for college, not because she hadn’t wanted parties, but because she couldn’t imagine anyone, let alone her parents, wanting to throw her the kind of party she had wanted. Her mother didn’t wait for her to answer, clearly loving the idea of taking a walk down recent memory lane.

As Mommy took the shiny blue backed DVD and inserted it into the player beneath the TV, Kelsey nervously bit into her bottom lip. It was time to see how the other her lived this life. Perhaps she’d get a view of her future, should she fail, by looking at her rewritten past.

The pictures of smiling, giggling boys and girls, all around her age, and cheery high paced music of the Beatles singing “Today Is Your Birthday” filled the screen and Kelsey immediately regretted her decision. A montage of her and a smattering of other Forbies filled the screen. She was wearing an absolutely adorable sunshine colored romper. Susie was in the purplest and frilliest party dress Kelsey had ever seen, complete with oversized matching bow, and the outfit still did nothing to cover her diaper.

Who was that girl hugging her so tightly in that one shot? The one in the Supergirl T-shirt, complete with Velcro attached cape, with the diaper clearly sagging beneath those loose fitting jean shorts? A terrible rock-like feeling settled into the pit of Kelsey’s gut. “Dakota?!”

“That’s right!” Mommy chimed in, “All your little friends were there? Remember?” Kelsey didn’t remember it, but she dearly wished she had. The clips showed a bounce house, pin the tail on the donkey, and balloon animals; all of Kelsey’s favorite things.

A quick cut and a fading of the soundtrack later showed Kelsey sitting topless in her highchair, her tiny breasts on full display as all the other kids and their parents gathered around and sang “Happy Birthday To You,” in wonderful off key unison.

Cut to a star wipe, and Kelsey watched herself covered chin to chest in chocolate cake that she had smashed all over herself, chewing happily and not caring that her mouth was too full to keep it all in. Along the periphery, the other Forbies were all chowing down. Dakota was using her play cape as a bib, while Susie sat in her mommy’s lap, being daintily fed chocolate cake by the spork-ful.

“Do you like your cake?” Daddy’s voice from behind the camera asked.

Forby Kelsey nodded unabashedly, gobs of chocolate frosting and crumbs hanging precariously from her chin. “Mmmhmmm!” She looked so...so...

“Happy,” Kelsey in the present day said. “I look happy.”

“You were happy that day,” Daddy said. “But you’ve always been a happy baby.”

“Our happy baby,” Mommy echoed.

The camera transitioned further into the party. A paper mache donkey with pizzazz dangled from the ceiling, as the Kelsey on camera; naked save for her diaper and a pink blindfold swung a stick at it. “A pinata?” Her resolve melted a little bit. She hadn’t gotten a pinata since she was six.

“I love this part,” her Mommy spoke up.

Kelsey watched herself take a wild swing at the candy filled burro. “ONE!” The assembled crowd shouted and clapped as she missed by a mile. Another swing. “TWO!” The second one didn’t come any closer to harming the rainbow colored punching bag.

Hypnotized, Kelsey could only watch herself- or someone who looked very much like her- swing the stick for a third time, the pinata on the string dancing upward trying to avoid it. Third time, as it turned out, was the charm, as the stick solidly connected with the soft underbelly of the paper mache creature.

A pang of jealousy rang out in Kelsey’s heart as candy rained down on the floor, and like a pack of dogs on a three legged cat, the party’s guests descended on the pile even as the last of the plastic wrapped confectionaries drizzled down on their heads. Kelsey sat up a little straighter and frowned a bit. It wasn’t fair, she decided. She was watching one of her longest running fantasies come true on camera, and she couldn’t remember a darn thing.

Maybe next year she could get to relive this moment....but then again, if her plan at the wishing fountain worked, she wouldn’t get to, would she? Shame.

Kelsey lost sight of herself as the camera zoomed in on the rapidly accumulating pile of candy beneath the dead pinata. Knowing herself, Kelsey’s time displaced doppelganger would waste no time in dropping the stick, shedding the blindfold, and scrambling into the fray with the other Forbies, peeling away tin foil covered chocolates and shoving them into her mouth. The real Kelsey was almost drooling as she watched chocolate coated fingers plunge unabashedly into open mouths. No napkins needed. And to think, she’d had all that freedom and all that fun, and all it had cost her was a lot of grown up big girl stuff; most of it she hadn’t really wanted or appreciated. If only she’d wished upon that star on her birthday, she could have had some real fun.



Jealousy unexpectedly gave way to a warped variation of nostalgia. Did she...did she actually remember that day? The way the chocolate tasted? The fun she'd had? She couldn't, could she?

But where was she on the recording? Her altered-past self had yet to make a move for the pile of delicious sweets while all the other kids were scrambling through it. That's when the camera panned back over to where Kelsey was still standing; or rather, squatting.

Nostalgia broke apart for shock, as the Kelsey on the DVD recording, now squatting like a major league catcher, a tell-tale look on her face as she groaned while the very bottom of her diaper slowly and subtly expanded. "Oh no," she whispered to herself, already realizing, if not remembering, what was happening. The mirror version of herself bent over low, using the floor and the tips of her fingers of one free hand- the other one snaking up to her mouth to be sucked on- to balance herself.

Cameraman Daddy swiveled his footing around to get the twenty-two year old baby in profile. "Uh-oh," the DVD Daddy said, "I know what that means." The 'Awwwws' of the other grown-ups created a kind of background chorus to cover up any rude noises made as Birthday Kelsey grunted and deposited something into the seat of her crinkling panties.

Kelsey could only watch the scene. Her Forbie-self had tuned out; concentrating and completely focused while the back of her diaper filled out and began to droop. The humiliating act caught on camera didn't last long, and the humiliation never seemed to set in, anyways. Instead, the Kelsey on camera waddled into the crowd, taking absolutely no notice to the state of her diaper, and dug in with two fists, getting armloads of candy for herself.

"Hey, honey," Daddy's voice came from behind the camera, "are you having fun at your birthday party?"

The Kelsey on the DVD looked back over her shoulder, her mouth already filled with malted milk balls and lips smeared with chocolate. "Mmmm-hmmm!"

"Do you want to get changed?" Her former not-quite self vigorously shook her head, giggling all the while as bits of brown spittle oozed forth from her lips.

A little brown waterfall crested over her bottom lip as she said, "Nuh-uhhhhhh".

"But don't you know what you did?" Daddy asked. In equal measure, Kelsey watched as the her that wasn't her nodded enthusiastically.

With a big, almost maddening grin, the Forbie-her on the recording shouted, "I MADE POOO-!" .

Kelsey couldn't take it. "STOP!" The Kelsey of the now shouted! "STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP!" Whether she was yelling at her parents to turn off the movie or yelling at her past self from a birthday party that never actually happened, even she didn't know. The T.V. was off in a flash. In the blink of an eye, her head was in Mommy's lap; though she couldn't say if she laid it there or whether it had been guided there... maybe both.

Mommy was stroking her hair and gently rubbing her temples. Her heartbeat, pounding in her chest just a moment before, started to slow. "Pookie, what's wrong?", she heard Daddy ask.

"I just wanna be happy," she moaned, the feeling in her stomach growing worse. "It's not fair." It really wasn't. She never thought she'd be envious of someone who pooped their pants in public; yet alone that that person would be her.

"But Pookie," Mommy said, patting her tummy. "You are happy. You've always been happy."  
"No I haven't!"

"Yes, you have!"

"No, I haven't!"

"Yes you have. You're just feeling a little fussy." Mommy planted a kiss right on her forehead and Kelsey felt all the better for it.

The feeling in the pit of her tummy worsened as Mommy rubbed it. She might have had some potty problems yesterday, but she still knew what that meant. She had to poopy. A creeping dread wormed its way into the back of her big girl brain. She wasn't fussy. She was losing it. She hadn't gone potty outside of her pants in forever...and it wasn't going potty if she was goin' in her pants...not really.

If she didn't go potty- for real potty- at least once, she'd never ever go again...and on a scarier level; she might not mind so much.

With surprising alacrity, she sat up.

"Pookie, what's wrong, now?" Mommy asked as Kelsey climbed to her haunches. Weight on the balls of her feet, Kelsey bit her lip, closed her eyes...and was about to push!

"Uh-oh," she heard Daddy say. "I know what that means." History was repeating itself! She felt her cheeks spread apart, bombay doors for her big kidneys getting ready to dump the last bits of the old her into the seat of her panties.

"Just let her finish," Mommy talked over her as if she couldn't hear.

Daddy added, "I'll go get a fresh diaper and wipes."

This was Pinocchio all over again; only there wasn't any Dakota to call her out and bring her back to focus. If she did the deed right now, she'd be gone. She had to go potty.

Now!

Clutching her stomach with her hands, Kelsey grit her teeth and stopped herself.

"That's right, Pookie. Just keep going, get it alllllll out. You're not fussy. Just gassy." Burning up inside her, the last of her big girl brain was incredulou...incredu...incred...she couldn't believe it! Mommy had no idea what she was really doing! Well, she'd show her, that's what! The DVD switched off, Bugs Bunny came back on, and judging by the words and sound effects, it was one she hadn't seen before.

Part of her relaxed, her attention drawn by the ramblings of the cartoon wabbit. It was only the slightest sound of her own crinkle that made her realize it. FOCUS!

Full of equal parts fury and panic, Kelsey bounced up into a full standing position, clenching her cheeks to avoid what she hoped wasn't the inevitable. Mommy looked confused "Pookie, what are you...?"

Kelsey didn't wait though. Big girls didn't wait to go to the potty, they just went. They didn't even ask permission. Pitter-pattering all the way, knees almost locked and guts screaming for pressure release, Kelsey hustled into the bathroom. Time to do it for real, with a real potty, not a stupid pretend chair like she had at the playhouse with Dragon Jammies the other day. Time to be a big girl, once and for all!

An involuntary shiver wriggled it's way up her legs as bare feet touched the cold bathroom floor. It was sweet relief to her brain, a familiar discomfort for once. She'd have to get used to that, she promised herself, almost remembering the cold shiver from going potty first thing in the morning. It was from the bathroom, right? Right

Daddy's heavy footsteps shaking the floor signaled his return. A fresh diaper and pack of wipes in his hands, he passed the bathroom door, before walking backwards and doing a double take; a confused look plastered on his mug. Good. She needed a witness. The people of this strange new world she'd created didn't seem to believe something unless they saw it with their own eyes. Time for Daddy to see his baby girl was potty trained.

Then, in her biggest big girl voice that she could manage, Kelsey pressed the backs of her knees against the edge of the potty and yelled "BABY'S GOTTA GO POTTY!" With an air of authority, she plopped down on the potty lid as hard as she could so that she could use the potty extra hard.

She waited.

Daddy looked at her.

She looked back.

And waited. And wriggled

And waited. And fidgeted.

And waited. And sucked her thumb.

What next? Had she pottied yet? Had she done it?

“Pookie?” Daddy said at last. “What are you doing?”

Feeling a bit offended, Kelsey answered, “Goin’ potty...”

Daddy chuckled at that. “Kelsey, the lid’s down.”

“Huh?”

“The lid’s down, Pookie. First, you gotta lift the seat up. Then you gotta make sure your diaper is off, and then sit and then-”

Kelsey didn’t wait; couldn’t wait. Her big girl brain was completely overwhelmed. Too many steps. Too many steps! By the time Daddy was telling her she was pottying wrong, she’d felt completely overwhelmed. Instead of trying to do the brain surgery that was usin’ the potty and liftin’ the seat and then whatever came next, Kelsey lifted the only seat that mattered: her own. With all her might, she pushed, and pushed, and pushed, her bum and sanity dangling barely an inch above the solid surface beneath her, till inch by inch, the contents of her tummy wormed and squirmed its way out of her. All those icky thoughts of bein’ a big girl went out with all the other poopy things about her life up until that point and landed firmly into the backseat of her diapee; where they belonged.

The proud little forever baby smiled and let out a manic giggle as the solid and familiar warmth filled the back of her diapee, making it crinkle and smush; spreading as the padding expanded to its furthest point.

The warmth, and delightful yet familiar squish-squish only got better when she wiggled her messy bum all over the hard toilet seat. It was rather like a highchair, really, though the extra freedom to move and wriggle and spread the solid mess around in her diapee made it really fun. This must be why big kids liked the potty so much!

But was it worth it? Really? Why go all the way to the dumb ol' potty every time she'd have to pee-pee or poo-poo? She had no idea how much playtime she'd lose that way, but she knew it was a lot. And all of her friends wore diapees too. Why would she want to be the only one who used the potty? Pretendin' to use the potty was fun though. Kelsey liked pretendin'.

A big smile on her face, Kelsey stood up and plopped back down on her butt, just so Daddy could see her pretend using the potty again. The feeling of her poopy spreading around in her diapee the second time was still just as much fun as the first time. "So big! Such a big kid!" she proclaimed, remembering the forever ago when she had first pretended to go potty. Gosh it was so much fun to pretend!

Daddy was definitely proud of her, he was smiling so big. "That's..heh...heh-heh...very good, baby. You're a natural." He looked like he was really proud of her. He was turning red and his stomach was doing more of that jiggy thing. He must've been thinking of a really funny Bugs Bunny Cartoon just then.

Mommy inched her way past Daddy and into the bathroom. "Very good, Pookie!" She took Kelsey's hand and guided her up. "Now let's go get you changed."

"But I used the potty!" She was pretending extra hard! That meant she got to stay in her diaper as long as she wanted, right? Because even though the poopy was still in her diapee she HAD used the potty, right? Right.

"Yes, and that was very impressive," Mommy said, her tone dripping with a sing-song-sweetness, "but I don't want my big girl getting a rash." Kelsey sulked a bit as she was lead back into the living room so that Mommy could change her. Stupid potty.

They were changing her right away, and her mess hadn't even cooled yet. This potty thing wasn't as good as it seemed to be. It just let the grown-ups know when she'd pooped. Forget the potty. Maybe next time she could do it at daycare or the mall or the playground, some place where it might be awhile before they caught her poopin' and she could keep playing. Oh she wished that could happen. Heeeeeeeey....there was something she could REALLY wish for.

She hadn't even finished the thought before Mommy unbuttoned the snaps on her Little Mermaid diapee cover. The sound of the phone ringing and her Daddy going to answer caught Kelsey's attention just as Mommy went to rip the tapes off her diapee.

While Daddy talked to Susie's Mommy in the kitchen, Kelsey got her butt wiped; and with that the young woman that she might have been if not for a fateful wish, was wiped clean too.

### 3.

#### Susie

Susie dipped her chin into the foamy blanket of water, giving herself a sweet-smelling beard. She loved bubble baths: The smells, the tickling textures, the feeling of Mommy gently scrubbing away all her aches and pains from a busy day of play. No need for soap, either. The water was the soap. Bubble baths really were the perfect end to a perfect day.

And with tomorrow's sleepover to look forward to, the world was going to be even better than perfect. Susie couldn't fully enjoy the bath, though, even as Mommy tickled her chin, gently flicking under the bubble beard Susie had made for herself. The world was fuzzy all of a sudden, and it wasn't just because Susie wasn't allowed to wear her glasses in the tub.

Something was bothering Susie, like a tiny blister or a toothache except it was in her brain. There was an annoying, niggling, nagging little voice in the back of her head that was telling her that all of this was wrong. Mommy shouldn't be giving her bath, bubbles or not, caressing her delicate skin and humming 'Rub-A-Dub-Dub'. She shouldn't be looking forward to getting re-diapered and put in her pretty pink pajammies.

All of this was wrong. This wasn't her. None of this was her. That's what the voice kept saying anyway.

It was screaming, but it was very far away, so it was still quiet, like an old friend calling out on the playground trying to catch up with the rest of the group. Tomorrow wasn't supposed to be a sleepover, was it? No; that had been a fib that she had told Mommy to get her bestest friends together. But why would she fib to Mommy? The little Forbie girl had sassed Mommy, sure, and gotten her justly deserved spanking for being sassy in the deal, but she'd never lied to her before. Not that she could remember.

But if Susie was meeting with Dakota and Kelsey, and it wasn't supposed to be a sleepover, why were they meeting? Mommy's washcloth dragged over her face, getting rid of the bubble beard and moved on to behind her ears.

Had she still possessed the appropriate vocabulary, Susan would have recognized the amounts of cognitive dissonance running through her brain. More than likely, Susan's own stubborn pride, sense of agency and rightful embarrassment at being naked in front of her own mother would have put the kibosh on this whole 'bath', and she would have ruthlessly said or done anything to get out of this terrible situation. That was a lifetime ago; even if that lifetime had only ended less than two days previously, and so Susie was more than content to let her Mommy get behind her ears and in all the little nooks and crannies during what was clearly a routine bubble bath.

“What’s wrong, Susie?” Mommy’s voice broke in. “You look, sad.”

The girl-who-would-be-accountant looked up into her mother’s face. “I do?”

Mommy put down the washcloth. “You only look like that when you’re thinking hard about something. Are you nervous about the sleepover tomorrow?”

Susie blanched. How did Mommy always know? “No...?” she said in the way of toddlers who don’t fully understand what they’re saying. “I mean...Mommy, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure, baby girl. Shoot.”

“Can we get rid of all of my frilly dresses and stuff?”

A frown and a furrowed brow flashed across Mommy’s face, then vanished behind a mix of concern and inquisitiveness. “Is this because you’re trying to be a big girl again? Honey, we had this talk yester-“

“No!” Susie interrupted, even though she knew she shouldn’t. “I was just wanting to try somethin’ different.”

Mommy narrowed her eyes. “How different?”

The Forbie sunk down in the bubbles. “Pants? Somethin’ so that people can’t see my diapee,” then she thought of the ‘panties’ that had been shimmied up her hips this morning. “Or my legs.”

“But your dresses are so pretty,” Janet (why was Susie starting to think of Mommy as ‘Janet’?) said. “You wouldn’t want to waste all of your pretty clothes.”

Susie wanted to sass something back. There was something of the old her lurking there under the bubbles. Something that demanded satisfaction. Something that existed deep within her even back when she’d made the wish that put her in this position. But back-sass got her paddled. That was no good. The Forbie’s temper was held in check by a healthy, almost godlike fear of her own mother. “Pweeeeeeease....” She pouted her lips. “Wouldn’t I look pretty in anything? Even shortalls?” Now it was Mommy’s turn to blanch. Susie spoke quickly, “Pink shortalls?”

“What has gotten into you the last few days? All of this silliness is so unlike you. You love your cute dresses.”

There, naked in the bathtub, looking the most like a grown-up that she had in the last forty-eight hours, Susie summoned up all of her remaining willpower and spoke her truth. “I wanna have a

choice.” That’s what this was all about at its core. That’s what had caused the great divide between Susan and Janet. “Even if it’s just a little choice, like what I’m wearin’ over my diapee. I’m never gonna grow up...but I still wanna have a choice over...over...sumfin’!”

Any and all concern, or sternness, and worry melted out of Janet’s face. Janet was gone. Mommy was in her place. “Ooooooh sweetie. Is that what all this back sass and stubbornness has been about? Is that why you’ve been so fussy?”

“Uh-huh,” Susie nodded. “Aaaaand I wanna help out in the restaurant, too.” Mommy took Susie’s face into her hands. “But honey, you’re too little to work in the restaurant. There’s hot and messy things all over. I couldn’t possibly risk getting you all dirty, or hurt.”

A long-buried memory of when Susan was three bubbled up as brilliant new inspiration in Susie’s mind. “Menus? Maybe I can pass out menus?”

“Susie,” Mommy said, “I thought you didn’t want to work in the restaurant.”

“I just wanna have the choice,” Susie felt as much as she heard her voice crack. “That’s all.”

Mommy seemed to be arguing with herself; frowning again, and doing her own pouty lip (so that’s where Susie got it from); eyes darting from side to side like a rapid game of ping-pong. “Ooooooh, I never could say ‘no’ to you. If you want some new clothes, that’s fine by me. And if you want to be part of the family business, you can be my helper....for real this time.”

And just like that, the last memories of who she used to be were replaced with who she was. A long standing rift between Susan and Janet had been wiped away, replaced only with Susie and her Mommy. “MOMMY!” Water cascaded off of Susan’s naked body as she all-but leaped out of the tubby and into her mother’s waiting arms, almost tripping as her shins hit the rim of the bathtub. “MOMMY MOMMY MOMMY MOMMY MOMMY!” She shouted the name at the top of her lungs, as if in exaltation of her god.

“EASY SUSIE!” Mommy laughed, not caring as her daughter drenched her. “EASY! It’s not time for MY bath yet!” More laughter from both of them bounced around in their ears. “Now let’s dry you off and get you to bed. I bet Flopsy misses you.” A clean white fluffy towel was wrapped around the still gleeful and trembling forever baby. “We can even go shopping for some new clothes, before we go pick up your little friends at the wishing fountain.

“That’s okay,” Susie said, giggling. “I don’t want ‘em no more.”

“Hmmm?”

“I just wanted the choice, that’s all.”



#### 4.

#### Dakota

There's a strange thing about waiting; a way that simple silence and prolonged idleness can change a person. Action is easy: You do something. You get feedback. You react to the feedback and do something else. Wash, rinse, repeat, until all transactions are exhausted to personal satisfaction. Action is a test of someone's most basic instincts; how they react on instinct and impulse. But waiting; that's a measure of someone's will.

Ambition and desperation- or whatever moniker; that call for action chooses; becomes planning. But then planning gives way to anticipation. If anticipation ferments and festers for too long, stewed by an increasing sense of helplessness, it can mutate into anxiety with a hint of complete and utter nerve-fraying paranoia.

Such was the case with a certain (now definitely ex-) sex kitten queen-bee. Surrounded by her long-forgotten childhood friends, and chugging along on a high energy cocktail of disgust (because diapers...eww), white-hot fear (because Susie had definitely all-but lost her gourd and Dakota might very well be next) and feeling out of other viable options, (because eff it, it worked the first time) the wishing fountain plan seemed like the most solid bet imaginable. As it turns out, just because something is the best option doesn't mean it's a good one.

When Daddy had put her to bed and raised the bars of her crib up high, locking her in for the night, Dakota couldn't sleep. Even the cheery mobile above her head failed to hypnotize her as it had the previous night. Instead, all the babied blonde could do was wait...and wait...and wait...but sleep wouldn't claim her.

A million-billion thoughts rattled around in her normally full and confident head. The ball was rolling and fully well out of her control. Her entire future (and past come to think of it) would be down to this one roll of the dice, (or flip of a coin...whatever). There were so many 'what ifs', though. What if wishing on a star was the only kind of wish that worked? What if the grown-ups didn't take them to Kelsey's wishing fountain? What if Susie was too far gone to focus on the right wish? What if Dakota and Kelsey were too grown up to tap into whatever insane child-like magic that had lit that spark in the first place? What if their new wish had unintended consequences like the one they'd made twenty years ago?

No matter how many ways she phrased it in her mind, Dakota's worries all boiled down to one thing: What if this didn't work?

That was the thought that kept her up all night and unable to so much as close her eyes beyond a blink. Some instinctive, lizard part of her brain was terrified that this wasn't going to work, and that she'd close her eyes and the grown-up part of her would never wake up again. She was so focused on the upcoming day's events that she barely noticed the sun cresting through her window, breaking the seemingly endless night. So intent upon her impending infantile doom was

she, that she hadn't realized she'd thoroughly soaked her diaper during the night until Daddy came in and changed her.

That's what she told herself, anyways.

"I'm not losing it," she mumbled. "I'm a grown-up. I'm a grown-up. I'm tall and pretty and scary and boys like me and girls are jealous." It was every bit of her identity that she could cling onto. Dakota, the reputedly sweet little angel circa twenty years past wouldn't be able to pull this off. Dakota the b-word that could make anyone do whatever she wanted with just a wink or a scowl was needed to get through this. "I'm not losing it. I'm a grown-up. I'm tall and pretty and scary and boys like me..." She whispered this mantra to herself through this morning's banana flavored mush (yuck...banana). She kept saying it as a sky-blue sun dress that wouldn't quite cover her diaper if she bent down was pulled over her head and matching crocs (ugh...crocs) were strapped onto her feet. Dakota even kept up her little prayer as Daddy unbuckled her out of her car seat and took hold of her hand. (Crud! What was Daddy's real name?!)

Hair back up in pigtails, and crinkling with every step, Dakota's tired eyes blurred in and out of focus. The mid-morning sun was in just the right (wrong) position so that it was hard to differentiate any of the blur people walking along the cobbled paths of the old college. She couldn't see any of her fellow not-quite Forbies. Truthfully, she wasn't even sure this was the right place. Lord knew she'd never actually been on campus before (the occasional party with whatever fling didn't count). "Daddy?" she called to the man right beside her.

"Yes Dakota?"

"We're still going to the wishing fountain, right?"

"Wishing fountain?"

The question alone made a jolt of panic signal in her chest. How did Daddy not know about the wishing fountain? That had been the plan. "The wishing fountain," she repeated. "That's where we're meeting, right?" The clatter of a rolling suitcase packed full of Dakota-sized onesies and Dakota-sized diapers bobbing along on old fashioned cobblestone was the only sound Dakota heard in reply. "Daddy?"

"Hmmm?" Daddy said, coming out of a haze of some sort. "Oh yeah. The fountain by the old dorms. That's right, honey. We're going to that fountain."

The stinging, tickling, almost jittery panic in her breast died down a bit. "Can I have a coin to make a wish?"

Daddy scoffed, audibly, and then softened his tone. "I don't think so, honey." In an instant that same rush of panic was back with a vengeance. How could she make a wish if she had no coin? "Wishing fountains don't really work."

The babied blonde's legs stopped moving. Reflexively her heels dug into the ground and her fingers dug into the backside of Daddy's hand.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" She wailed. Unbidden, the thought that this was all a gigantic waste of time, not even a band-aid of the bleeding wound of her sanity, intruded on her. "No! No! No! No!" Each word was punctuated with the stamping of a croc adorned foot. It would only work if she believed it and her stupid, (stupid, stupid, stupid) Daddy had put a bit of doubt in her head. And that was a thought that she could in no way tolerate.

This was going to work. IT HAD TO!

"They do work!" She all-but screamed at her father. "They DO! THEY DO THEY DO THEY DO!"

Blurred people around them, all so unimportant before the moment, started to stop and stare at the father-daughter pair. Dakota was making a scene. Good. Whether a giant toddler or a full grown terror, making a scene was something that was still in her soul's toolbox. Dakota started to let out a low whining moan, something any parent will tell you is a telltale precursor to a full-fledged temper tantrum.

Confronted with judgmental stares of strangers and passerby, Daddy did the only thing he could do; the thing Dakota knew he'd do. He caved. "Okay okay," he shushed. "They do work! They do work!" Already he had released the rolling suitcase and was digging around in his pockets for change. "Here. We'll go make a wish, together." He held out a faded quarter.

Quickly, and without hesitation, the girl snatched it from her father's hand. He had at least a hundred pounds and six inches on her, but out here in the open, where she was an adorable tot and he, a (tired but) doting father; she was very clearly in control. Some part of her felt comforted by that.

Waiting....waiting had sucked. But acting on something...playing on people's expectations and emotions...that was good...that was right. Dakota was already beginning to feel more and more grown-up.

Her whining died down a little, and she looked up at Daddy, clenching the quarter tightly in her hand. "More...?" Even with the inflection, both of them knew it really wasn't a question.

"More?" Daddy said. "Dakota, baby, you only need one for a wish."

Her lip pouted out and her eyes became full saucers. “Foh my fwiends...” she put on a fake (at least it was meant to be fake) affectation. Oh crud! How much would it suck if she got stuck with a permanent baby lisp? Quickly, Dakota cleared her throat. “For my friends...” (Phew!)

The jingling of loose change was music to her ears as Daddy fished out another handful.

“All I’ve got is pennies and di-”

“That works!” Dakota snatched the coins from his hand and took off at a full waddle down the cobblestone path.

“Dakota! Wait!”

The clink clack ching chang of the coins rattle around in her hand was a symphony of freedom. So joyously focused was Dakota, that she barely even noticed the crinkling made with each skipping step while the tired click-clacking of plastic wheels on cobblestone rushed to keep pace with her.

A surge of impatience and adrenaline cleared her sleep deprived vision, as blurred colors and shapes gained crisp detail and new focus. Not quite a hundred yards ahead of her, distant yet still unmistakable in all of its gargoyle gray glory, sat the fountain at the center of the courtyard. The jangling of lose change stopped as Dakota gripped the coins harder, breaking out into a sprint.

“I wish, I wish, I wish wish wish wish wish wish-”

“DAKOTA! STO-!”

Still running, Dakota looked over her shoulder to see how far ahead she was of Daddy. An involuntary ‘oof’ shot out of her as she collided dead on with another body. The babied blonde didn’t make it a step back before she was tripping over her own feet and plunging, diapered bottom first onto the cobblestone beneath her. A muffled hiss, like helium escaping a pinhole leak filled the air as the thick padding beneath her absorbed most of the impact. “Oooooooooooh FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUDGE!” (And yes, she DID say fudge). The jolt of panic she felt as she heard tiny pieces of metal falling out of her grasp almost made her not notice the wet warmth and spreading squish as she went pee-pee in her baby pants....almost. On the verge of losing her temper, Dakota let out a curse. “Poopie!”

“Oh yeah?” A familiar voice across from her, asked. “Neat.” The bediapered queen bee snapped her head up in a scowl, which immediately softened upon recognition of the speaker. Sitting across from her, equally splay legged; diaper bulging and slightly discolored from wetness; was Susie. The other girl’s diaper might have been fuller, and her shoes a pair of pink sneakers with frilly socks, with glasses strapped on to her head by an elastic band, but Dakota’s

fashion sense -sharp as ever- noticed a crucial similarity. Their sundresses-Dakota's blue and Susie's pink- were otherwise identical.

Susie giggled. "Sorry 'bout that Dakota," she said. "I must've tripped or somethin'. I was just 'cited ta see ya and I wanted to give ya a big huggy." The girl snickered again and patted her padded crotch. "Heh....huggie." She looked up. "Ready for the sleepover?" As Susie (it was definitely Susie now...full Forbie) jostled herself, the sound of panicked footsteps raced up from both directions.

Air rushed into Dakota's lungs and the world rattled around her as she frantically searched the ground for her lost coins, knowing what was about to happen. She was vaguely aware of a pair of heels clapping up behind her friend. "Susie!" Quarter. Penny. Dime? Where was the dime?!

"Dakota!" Two calloused hands snaked themselves under Dakota's arms, hoisting her up to her feet. "Are you okay?" Not okay. Definitely not okay. The ground was falling away from her. Three wishes did this mess, three wishes had to undo it. And for that, three coins were needed. The not-quite-Forbie's heart sank, as her stomach gurgled a bit. (That banana mush wasn't sitting right with her.) Where was that dime?!

"Oh shiny!"

Dakota looked up from the ground. Maybe it was that Susie's diaper was heavier, or that her mommy wasn't as strong as Dakota's Daddy so it took longer for Susie to be lifted to her feet, giving her time to notice. Maybe the glasses strapped to her head made it easier for her to notice a small gleaming disc of metal wedged between two cobblestones. Maybe it was something akin to fate (or dumb luck). Whatever it was, Susie now had a dime sitting in the palm of her hand.

"Susie!" her mommy asked, smoothing out the pink sundress and checking the forever baby over for scuffs or scrapes or bruises. "Are you alright, baby doll?" Susie nodded dumbly, marveling at the shiny object in her hand, while the real adult looked her up and down.

Following the other grown-up's lead, Daddy started doing the same. "Kids, huh?" He let out a dry, nervous chuckle. "They get so excited and into things that they forget to look where they're going, huh?" Dakota could only grit her teeth and try not to squirm as Daddy adjusted her dress back on her shoulder and ran his hands along her elbows and legs. She liked it when boys were up in her personal space, not her father! Yuck!

"That they do," the lady in the dress agreed. Dakota could only stare as her former counterpart; who only yesterday had been a voice of reason; allowed herself to be poked and prodded, not even seeming to notice as her mother cupped the front of her sagging, swaying, discolored diaper. "You're about ready for a change, little lady." Mrs. Susie's Mommy shook her head a

bit, and sighed. "That's what I get for giving you watermelon for breakfast. Goes right through you, doesn't it?" Still staring at the dime in her hands, Susie punctuated her mother's point with a muffled fart. "Both ends, too."

Both the grown-ups laughed at that. Susie's mother laughed at her own 'cleverness'; but Daddy's laugh was different, yet somehow familiar. Where had Dakota heard that kind of laugh, before? The feeling of her dress being lifted so that Daddy could pull back the waistband of her diaper interrupted her puzzling. "Daddy! I'm fine!" She slapped back his hand and he withdrew it as if he'd been stung.

Whirling around so quickly that the entirety of her diaper flashed, she looked him the eye. He was surprised, and hurt, and momentarily cowed, but then his eyes shot over Dakota's shoulder, and his face showed concern; just not for her. Susie's mommy was busy digging through a diaper bag. Susie, was giggling like an idiot at her dime. "Now where is that changing pad?"

"Sorry," Daddy spoke up, "I forgot to bring Dakota's. All of her stuff is in her suitcase."

Susie's mom seemed to miss the comment and just said. "We'll just have to find a clean bathroom." She grabbed Susie's free hand and moved to walk away from the pair.

That got the Forbie's attention. "But Mommy..." Susie half-whined "My friends-!"

"Can wait till after you're cleaned up"

"But I founda shiny! Now I can make-uh wish!" Dakota felt a smidgen of relief. Maybe the little stick in the mud wasn't as far gone as she'd thought. The balm of relief soothed her nerves even more when she distinctly saw Susie wink at her and mouth the words, "I 'member".

"You can make your little wish after you're changed." The matter seemed fairly settled, as far as the grown-up lady was concerned. (Grown-up? Not grown-up...not the only grown-up lady anyhoo.)

Another fart eeked out from the back of Susie in protest. "But I'm not doooooone."

That gave the ol' ma'am pause. "It would be easier to change you once instead of twice," she said more to herself than her daughter. "But once you make your boom-booms, we get you changed."

That was enough for Susie to jump up and down, free hand hoisted into the air, while her soaked nappy bounced out of time with her. "Yaaaaaay!" Out of a long buried form of politeness, Dakota pretended to be deeply interested in the color of her (ugh) crocs and looked

away. "Wish time! Wishie wishie!" If only there'd been a way for the blonde (it better not be) forever baby to avert her hearing, too.

The sound of heels clicking off and away, along with the enthusiastic cheering of a giant toddler becoming fainter signalled the mother-daughter pair gaining distance. The feeling of a hand clasp her own and moving to drag her along announced their own movement. Bratting it up, Dakota tried to yank her hand free again. "Daaaaddy!" Nothing happened. His grip was iron, now.

"Dakota, hush," Daddy said in a strangely authoritative tone. "That's enough, now. We're going to see your little friends, and that's that. No more distractions." Daddy didn't talk to her that way. Nobody did! But for some reason, she couldn't help but fall in step and follow him following them. (At least they were still headed in the right direction.) Also, at least her diaper wasn't crinkling as much.

Looking up at Daddy, a question re-entered her conscious. What was up with him all of a sudden? Last night, he could barely be bothered to look up from the T.V. to check her diapee, and just a few minutes ago he was willing to scramble through his pockets (prolly even beg if necessary) just so she wouldn't make a scene. He was tired. He was beaten down. He was the same ol' Daddy that she'd known for most of her life.

Slowing his stride just enough so that he was parallel to her, Daddy released her hand placed an arm around her shoulders and Dakota couldn't help herself but to lean into him and tilt her head onto his shoulder. A small hum, rather like a purr, buzzed from her closed lips. "That's my girl," he whispered. Without thinking, she wrapped her newly freed hand around his waist and kept walking. She smiled softly and breathed in through her nose. He smelled good. Was he wearing cologne? Daddy never wore cologne. Not the 'old' Daddy, anyways.

Her gaze looked ahead, again, and Dakota's mouth became as dry as she (kind of) wished her pants were. Susie and her Mommy were walking in exactly the same fashion. Right in front of everyone, she was slipping. She was liking this! She was transforming into a total daddy's girl! Heart pounding, Dakota checked her free hand to make sure she hadn't stupidly (like a baby) dropped the other two coins. If she didn't act soon, she'd be condemned to a lifetime of playing with kiddie toys and pooping her pants and well....liking it. She might even start liking Alice! (NOOOOOOOO!)

The social mastermind tilted her head up to look at Daddy. What could she do to derail this train? What could she say? How to stop the momentum? A quick gurgling in her gut gave her some advice that she refused to even consider.

Daddy nuzzled her head with his, a sign of fatherly affection almost completely forgotten. Less than a dozen steps ahead, (were they walking a little faster?), the Mommy-forever baby girl duo were doing the exact same thing. The dots finally started to connect.

Oh crud muffins! He was mirroring Mrs. Susie's Mom! Copying her and following her lead! He actually cared about what this lady thought! But wh-? Dakota didn't even need to finish that thought. She now recognized the fleeting glances she'd seen in her father's eyes. Whether it was middle school or middle aged, some looks from men were all the same. (Ew....Gross!) Her Daddy liked her friend's mommy! Like, like-like! If the fall hadn't already emptied the young woman's bladder, this surely would have.

"Daddy...?"

"Yes, baby?"

"Why are you copying Mrs. Susie's Mommy?"

The young woman could almost swear she felt her father blush. "What do you mea-?", then he changed mid-stream. "Whoops here we are!"

Indeed they were. Directly in front of the foursome, was the large circular concrete, barely knee high pool. A weak spray of water shot into air, manufacturing a constant tinkling sound as the little water droplets landed back down into the pool, only to be sucked up by some subtle filter or another to go on the next ride.

This was the wishing fountain? For some reason, Dakota had pictured some deep well or site with a majestic statue...at least a plaque. This was closer to a big ol' permanent kiddie pool. Sheesh, she'd seen slip-n-slides at frat parties with more water pressure than this pathetic thing. This was her best chance for getting her big girl panties back?

A cloud moved away from the mid morning sun and fountain sparkled from the inside out as an octopus's garden of loose change reflected the morning star's light back up into her eyes. Stars. They looked so much like the little stars, twinkling in the water. Only the sun was out, and they were on the ground, instead of in the dark and up in the sky.

And just like that, the most wonderful, childlike sensation filled the normally cynical squaw: hope. This was almost the exact opposite of the wishing star. (THANK GAWD SHE STILL UNDERSTOOD OPPOSITES!) Bright blue sky instead of dark black! Shinies down in the water instead of up in the sky! Fast wishes instead of slow ones! GROWN-UP AGAIN INSTEAD OF BEING A BABY FOREVER!

This really was just so crazy it might just work! Dakota looked to her side and saw Susie, grinning so hard that bits of drool were threatening to slip from her mouth. She was ready. Dakota was ready. Everything was ready. There was just one component...person...missing.



She looked to the left, and then the right. No Kelsey in sight “Where’s-?” From behind, a frizzy haired blur in yellow latched onto Dakota before another phoneme could be uttered.

“Ohmygawd’kotaldidn’tthinkyou’dmakeitandwe’dmissoutonourchance!” The river of words assaulted Dakota’s ears as the little bird of a girl somehow managed to squeeze the breath out of the taller woman. Dakota’s own grin nearly matched Susie’s as she wriggled around and hugged Kelsey back. A first time observer would never think that they barely tolerated each other just the day before and would have despised each other the day before that.

(But then again, isn’t that how little girls often were? Best friends and then sworn enemies and then back all over again?)

Pushing the rogue thought aside, Dakota pried herself away so she could look at her once-victim dead on. “We’re all here,” she said. “ Ready to do this?”

“Uh-huh!” Kelsey nodded, her own yellow sundress an almost perfect stylistic match for Dakota’s and Susie’s respective outfits. “We should say what we’re gonna wish for!” She hopped a little bit as she spoke.

Dakota scoffed. “What?”

“That’s how it works!” Kelsey insisted, her own eyes twinkling like so many quarters just beneath the water. “If we don’t, we might wish for diff’rent things, and it won’t work!”

“Yeah!” Susie agreed, breaking away from her Mommy and trotting up next to them. Daddy and her were talking about something. “We don’t wanna wish for diff’rent stuff, right?” Oh, wisdom from the mouths of babes....

“I see your point...”

Kelsey grabbed onto Dakota’s white-knuckled wrist. “Let’s say it together.” Dakota couldn’t help but roll her eyes as Susie took the other wrist and held hands with Kelsey, completing the circle.

Rushed and impatient, Dakota growled a bit so she barely noticed her stomach’s complaint. “Fine...”

“One...” said Kelsey

“Two...” Dakota said.

“EIGHT!” Susie yelled and the three all spoke in unison.

“To playunhave onwishthe theourbest playoldsleep groundwish! ov er ever!!”

All three girls stopped and looked at each other, each clearly confused.

“What did you say?” Dakota asked.

Cocking her head to the side, Susie repeated herself. “To have the best sleepover ever!”

Dakota’s frown deepened. Yeah, as far gone as Susie was, that checked out. Hopefully, it was nothing that couldn’t be worked out with a little careful redirection. “No stu-...!” Dakota stopped herself. (Careful.) “I mean...no silly!” A forced, fake, laugh tittered out from her. “We don’t need to wish for THAT!” Teeth clenched and lips pulled back into a nervous grin. “We’re supposed to unwish our old wish, remember?”

“Huh?” Susie’s said. “What old wish?”

Dakota couldn’t help herself. “The one where we wished to be babies forever, duh!”

“Why would we wish that?” Susie asked. Her face scrunched up like something important had just dawned on her. “We’re already forever babies.” As if on cue, Susie bent her knees and her cheeks began to turn a shade of pink as she clenched her fists. Her eyes got a kind of far off look; a-looking-without-seeing type of expression.

Dakota felt a lump of despair and disgust knot up in her throat. She didn’t need to see the back of Susie’s diaper to know that it was rapidly inflating. An ex-gossip girl, she wasn’t much for reading lips, but she was all but certain that Susie was mouthing the words “Boom-Boom”, as she sighed and her diaper drooped down an extra inch. “All done.”

Her formerly well manicured hands shot down to her gurgling stomach on reflex. It was like watching a kid with lice; somebody else starts scratching and you can’t help but be next. (No! Not next! Never next!) Susie really had gone full Forbie, and Dakota realized she’d just given away a perfectly good wishing coin to a total goober. The hope to undo what had been set in motion by three now rested on the shoulders of two.

Just as Dakota was about to lose it, a shadow fell upon them. “Kelsey! There you are!” The deep gentle voice, cocooned in husky, labored breathing came from a small mountain of a man. Clearly overweight and out of shape, but still big enough to be intimidating, he towered over the diapered trio. “Don’t... run off like that...” he huffed “...scared the life out of your mother in me.” His hair, though graying, was an almost identical match to Kelsey’s. Standing in the pudgy giant’s shadow, pulling along a Hello Kitty suitcase, was a skinny little hen of a woman; obviously Kelsey’s mother.

Unflapped, Kelsey dug her front toe into the cobblestone ground, and sheepishly began to turn her foot. Biting her lip, she added in a "Sorry Daddy. Sorry Mommy. I'll try not to...". It was a lie. Dakota instinctively knew that. But it wasn't the type of lie that she typically told. Nothing manipulative or purposefully deceitful. It was the equivalent of a moocher promising to pay someone back. Not malicious, just lazy and unthoughtful. And yet...it worked.

"Okay pookie," her Daddy said. "Don't do it again, okay?" From the sound of it, even Kelsey's Daddy didn't even really believe it. It was just the same dance of constant rule reminders and then accidentally breaking those rules again and again that any toddler might go through with their parents. It was one's limited memory and impulse control playing off another's infinite patience.

The other grown-ups closed in on their little circle, each parent placing a hand on their little one's shoulder. They were surrounded. "We're all here," Daddy said. He looked over at the other parents. "Where's your car?"

"WHAT?!" It was Kelsey who piped in this time. "But! But! But! We were s'posed to do a wish!" Thank God that Kelsey still had her right mind about her. The grown-ups exchanged confused looks.

Daddy spoke up. "Dakota's got it in her head that if she throws a coin in the fountain, she gets a wish. I think she wants Kelsey and Susie to make wishes, too." That got a collected 'Awwwwww' from the people who weren't wearing disposable undies.

Susie's Mommy sniffed loudly and checked her daughter's diaper, again. "Oh, there we go." She glanced over at the fountain, running her hand along the long wide rim of the concrete wading pool. The wheels in her head were clearly turning. She looked to Kelsey's parents, "Otto? Linda?" Do you two happen to have a changing pad? I left Susie's in the car."

The little hen of a woman patted the pastel satchel resting atop the suitcase. "Sure do," she said, wasting no time before opening it and routing around for something to lay a rather large baby down on.

"Let's get you changed, little lady, and then we'll get everybody loaded up."

Susie bowed her head, annoyed, at having to step away from her friends, but clearly not bothered by the prospect of having her tushie wiped in public. "Yes, Mommy." Bowlegged, she started to waddle to the edge of the fountain, the changing mat quickly in place.

Loaded up?! No! "But...but...but...the wish!" Dakota stammered. "We haven't made our wish yet!" The lump in her throat moved down to her stomach, settling in like a rock.

"Yeah!" Kelsey agreed. "I wanted to go to the playground!"

Dakota, Kelsey's Mommy, and Kelsey's Daddy said the same thing. "Playground?"

The frizzy haired young lady, (Forbie...? No...couldn't be), nodded her head. "Uh-huh" she said.

"What playground?" Kelsey's Daddy asked, eyebrows arched.

Kelsey pointed down a side walkway past hedges and towards tall brick buildings. "The one that was over there!" She was all-but squealing. She bounced a little bit on the balls of her feet, listing amenities. "There's a playhouse, and a ball pit, and a bouncy castle, and a slide and a-

The big man interrupted. "Pookie, that wasn't an all the time playground. That was a special-

"BUT MY WIIIIISH!" Kelsey whined, her face turning pink. Meanwhile, Dakota was laying down on the edge of the fountain; being a good little helper and lifting up the hem of her too short sundress so that her mommy could get to the tapes easier.

For his part, Daddy was busying himself unzipping the suitcase, all while keeping an eye on Susie and Mrs. Susie's Mommy. Digging out a fresh diaper no doubt. Odds were that Dakota would be getting her own bum wiped as soon as Susie was done; some kind of weird, thirsty act to show he was a good father or somethin'.

"I WANT MY WISH!" Kelsey screamed over the sounds of tapes being ripped off Susie's diapee...(diaper! DIAPER!) "I WANT MY WISH AND I'M GONNA GET IT!"

Exasperatedly, Kelsey's parents took a deep breath, and her frizzy haired daddy started to speak in slow, deliberate tones. "Pookie. We've been over this. The playground day here at the University was a special- POOKIE!"

Kelsey ran. Sort of. It was the unpracticed, wobbling, waddling, flat footed clomping gait of a toddler who hadn't learned how to roll her feet, but it was fast all the same. It was probably, (probably) due to the bulky diaper she wore. The waddle was so pronounced that Kelsey ran with a kind of exaggerated sashay. A gust of wind caught the hem of her dress; putting her white puffy plastic backed panties on full display as they swayed from side to side with every stride. Not that she had any room to talk, but from what little she had learned (re-learned?) about diapers over the last day or two, Dakota felt it was a safe bet to guess that Kelsey wasn't dry. There was no other way her butt could look that swollen.

Dakota squeezed her hand even tighter, feeling the two remaining coins scrape against each other in her palm. The wish! Kelsey didn't have a coin for the wish! Going on pure impulse, the babied blonde took off after her frizzy haired friend. Her own footsteps clip clopped on the cobblestone beneath her, and she had to focus to roll her feet. It was probably (definitely) her own diaper. A distant and tired sounding "I'll get 'em..." rang out after her.

A quick blur of foliage as Dakota took a sharp right past the hedges, and she had caught up to Kelsey. "Quick, now's our chance!" Kelsey said. She reached down for the hem of her dress. "Get this dressie off of me." Without thinking, Dakota helped the other Forbie (other?) yank the dress off over her head, leaving her tiny breasts exposed, and her diaper completely out in the open. "Now, you!"

Just like how Daddy had dressed her but in reverse, Dakota threw her arms up and Kelsey yanked and jerked the floppy sundress. This was insane. This was absolutely insane! But...it just might work. If they could strip down out of these big baby clothes, maybe get some big girl panties on, then they could pass for normal again. Not everybody was a Forbie. There were high schoolers who weren't babies and there were grown-ups who were only a little older than her. Dakota could easily pass herself off as a high school senior or something. Looking down past her breasts, she noticed the baby blue crocs on her feet. "Shoes, too," she said. Thankfully, some things were still easy. She kicked off the foam slippers off her feet, and wriggled her toes.

Kelsey looked down at her sneakers. "How?" To Dakota's frustration, the girl couldn't find the words. How did one get past all that velcro?

The shoes weren't their biggest obstacle, anyways. Both of them were still wearing the most babyish thing possible. Sneakers could wait. "No time..." she growled softly. "Let's get out of these diapees...ers." Just as before, though, her hands pawed uselessly at the front of her diaper. Her padding might as well have been padlocked.

The little bird tilted her head and pouted her lip a bit. "Why?" she asked. A huffing and puffing sound was getting louder, coming from just on the other side of the hedges.

## 5.

### Dakota

Kelsey's petite, but surprisingly strong hand grasped Dakota's and yanked her along. "This way! Hurry! We can hide in the playhouse!" What the heck was Kelsey talking about? Topless, the two all-but sprinted past a final brick wall. "I've got friends who will hide us! One of them dresses like a dragon! That'll scare Daddy off long enough for us to play!"

Dakota looked past her (right now) friend, and tensed up. Directly ahead of them, in all of its freshly cut and perfectly manicured glory, bordered only by empty gothic walled dormitories....a lawn. In other words: Nothing but a wide open space. As her bare feet touched grass, Dakota dug her heels in and leaned back. Her skin barely starting to glisten, her arm was still slippery enough to break free from the yanking and tugging of her frizzie haired cohort.

The little bird jerked in the opposite direction, her fingers slipping off of Dakota's wrist, and her own haphazard momentum sent her tumbling onto the soft grass; the last remnants of morning dew making her slide an extra foot or three.

Kelsey's head jerked up, a manic gleeful grin plastered on her lips. "AGAIN!" Rapidly, she scrambled up to her feet, completely disregarding the bits of grass and dirt that flecked her naked chest. "That was what was missing last time! A slip-in-slide! I gotta tell the gro-!"

"KELSEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" It was both a question, and an accusation of sorts. "We can't get away OR make a wish if we're just running out in the open!"

"This isn't an open field, it's a-" Kelsey looked back over her shoulder, and froze. "Where is it?" She sounded confused, maybe even a little disappointed.

"Where's what?" Dakota asked.

"The playground."

Dakota slapped her thighs lightly, her frustration growing. "What playground?"

"It was super-fun and had all this neat stuff! Way better than the playground at Daycare and..."

Dakota tuned out the rest of the sentence, instead noticing another trickle leak out into her diaper and a slight cramp in her belly. She did not like where today was going. She opened her palm and pinched the penny between her thumb and forefinger "Kelsey, we're not going back to the daycare. We're going to make a wish." She waggled the shiny piece of copper in front of her cohort's face.

"A wish?" Kelsey's eyes unclouded for a second, and she snatched the penny from Dakota's waiting fingers. "Oh yeah! A wish! THAT's how the playground popped up last time! I just need to-" Another pang and a gut gurgle (or maybe just denial) broke off Dakota's train of thought.

“Kelsey....” the blonde’s words were careful and measured, “what are you going to wish for?”

“To go to the playground.”

All other sounds went mute as Dakota focused in on the stranger in front of her, even the huffing and puffing of a certain fat man jogging up behind them became muffled and unimportant. “We’re supposed to be wishing ourselves back into being grown-ups, remember?” If Dakota had consciously realized that she was saying ‘grown-ups’, instead of ‘adults’, she might have cried a bit.

“But we’re not grown-ups. We’ve never been grown-ups. We get to be babies; forever. Why would we wanna be big girls? Tha’s dumb!” It was the way in which Kelsey said this- akin to saying that the sky was blue or that country music sucks- like it was obvious fact, that made Dakota’s eyes start to water.

On the verge of complete and total despair, even more so than when this madness all started, Dakota bent her knees to look the frizzy haired little bird of a girl in the eyes. “Kelsey” she said. “Listen to me. We are not babies. We made a wish forever ago, but it didn’t come true till now. But we don’t want that wish no mo-...anymore. We’re not who we used ta be. We’re big girls. We used ta be big girls. We can be big girls again. We. Just. Need. To. Wish.”

A spark came back into Kelsey’s eyes. A spark of wonder and possibility; like telling a child that they can fly if they just think happy thoughts and add a little pixie dust. “Big girls?”

“Yes,” Dakota whispered. “Big girls. Be a big girl with me.” (Please let this work.)

“Big...”

“Yes...” (Come on...)

“...big girls.”

“Yes!” (Fly you beautiful bird, fly!)

“Big...big...” Kelsey broke off eye contact as she squatted a little lower to the ground. Her nostrils flared as she exhaled with a mighty huff.

On reflex, what few social niceties remained inside the babied blonde had Dakota take a step back and turn sideways, gazing at the all-too common freakshow out of the corner of her eye.

Her stomach churned, this time with a hint that the load might go back up, instead of down into her diaper. It was cartoon time at Daycare all over again, but this time, Dakota knew, no

manner of barbed insults or grossed out facial expressions would snap Kelsey back to being a big girl. A contented moan coming from Kelsey as she squatted a bit lower confirmed this. The little bird was now a pants-pooing baby chick through and through. Despite herself, Dakota turned her head to look the big-little girl in the eye. She looked determined, like she was psyching herself up; or maybe like she was concentrating and trying to solve a very hard math problem. Whatever was going through the girl's head, her diaper was filling up and sagging with each passing second.

Finally, after what felt like much too long, Kelsey stood straight up and closed her mouth; her loaded diaper struggling to maintain altitude. "All Done!" she said. "What were we talkin' 'bout?"

So engrossed was Dakota (and oh how gross it was), that she didn't notice the thundering footsteps of a man who could dress like Santa Claus everyday. "Uh-oh" Mr. Kelsey's Daddy said from behind her. "Even from across the lawn, I think I know what all that squatting and smilin' means." A yellow sundress draped over one shoulder, and a matching blue one hanging from the other, he called out, "You poopin', Pookie?"

A single muffled fart squeaked out from Kelsey's backside, a bodily afterthought from the horrible smelling mess that had just ejected itself into the girl's nappy. "Daddy!" she screamed out in pure joy. Rather like a bulbous tail, Kelsey's filled up backside swang in time with her naked breasts as she waddled up, and ran into her parent's arms. Her cooing was almost like a kind of guinea pig whistling; not even noticing or caring that the only thing she was wearing was a pair of tennies, a diaper that was on the verge of blowing out, and a smile.

All thoughts or memories of running away seemingly evaporated. They had been separated for all of two-minutes, tops, and yet Kelsey acted as if she'd spent months in solitary.

Muttering only to himself, her daddy hugged his Forbie with one arm and gently patted and prodded the expanded backside of his daughter's diaper, confirming what anyone with half-a-brain already knew. Kelsey just giggled as the mess in her disposable panties was smushed and sloshed around even more than it already had been; like she was delightfully ticklish down there, or just loved the attention. "Yeah, your Mom can take care of that one."

The girl seemed to barely register how embarrassed she should be as her Daddy started to redress her, gently pulling the dress over her head and guiding her arms through the sleeve holes. "Everyboooooody put your dress on, put your dress on, put your dress on." (Great...now she was singing...and tone deaf too.)

The big man, started singing along. "Everyboody put your dress on, so we can go out and plaaaay." (Ugh...he was worse.)



In that instant Dakota saw herself. Playing with dumb baby toys and watching dumb baby shows, and letting grown-ups dress her and undress her and feed her, and wait on her hand and foot; loving her unconditionally. No one would ever stop loving her and thinking she was cute; even if she...if she... she pictured herself stopping mid-thought just so she could push poopie into the back of her Pampers, while everyone looked on as if it were the most normal thing in the world. And part of her loved it.

“Here’s yours, Dakota”, Kelsey’s Daddy said, taking the pretty blue sundress from off his shoulder and shook it out a bit. He started a reprise the song. “Everyboooody put your dress on, put your dress on, put your dress on. The former queen bee mumbled something snarky or defiant, but even she couldn’t hear it. Her thumb was in the way. (When did that get there? Who cares?) She was alone now. Only a quarter to her name. “You can’t just go around naked,” the fat man said. “You’ll get a sunburn, or somethin’.”

A middle aged man was looking at her breasts in a wide open field, and it only now occurred to Dakota that she should be embarrassed. She froze as the blue sundress was pulled over head, her cheeks becoming a contrasting shade of pink. She was embarrassed, but only because she had realized that she should be. Was she changing too? “There we go,” the grown-up said. “All done.”

Done? “No.” Dakota whispered around her thumb. “No, no, no...!” There was still time to fix this! She could fix this! She could save them all.

Quarter held between her hands, newly moistened thumb out of her mouth, sundress flapping behind her and diaper crinkling beneath her, Dakota took back off in the direction from which she had come. “Oh criminy, not again,” was the response she got. “Dakoooota!”

Not breaking her stride, Dakota yelled back to the forever baby and her daddy, “I’m goin’ back to the fountain!”

“Wait! Don’t run!” the adult called after her.

If this was going to be her last few defiant moments, her last few adult thoughts in this lifetime, Dakota chose to use these moments after her own fashion.

Follow orders? Play it safe? Listen to anyone other than the voice in her head?

Ha! Fuck that.

She picked up speed, head and pigtails whipping back to the sky as she ran, her bare feet finding purchase back on the collegiate cobblestone. Zigging and zagging past decorative hedges. “Gotta get to the fountain! Gotta get to the fountain! Gotta-!”

Her toe stubbed on a loose stone, and the world started to go topsy-turvy as she lost her balance. Like a cat thrown out of a car, her arms flailed and her fingers splayed; instinctively trying to break her fall.

Strong, firm hands caught her by the arm as her nose dangled less than a foot from the rocky ground. "Easy there, honey." It was Daddy; her Daddy. "You had me worried for a second." Dakota didn't even bother to look up as her father pulled her back up to her feet. "Where are your shoes?" Dakota didn't avert her gaze from the ground, her eyes frantically scanning the little nooks and crannies in the cobblestone walkway. Her fall had been broken; now, so was her hope. The quarter wasn't in her hand anymore. She had dropped it, and she couldn't find it.

No longer caring about how she looked or what others thought of her, she tried to drop to the ground and comb the floor for her precious wish maker. "Dakota, what's gotten into you?" an unfamiliar voice asked. Now on all fours, crawling around, the ex-sex kitten didn't notice or care when a hand reached between her legs and squeezed her diaper. She cared even less that the hand didn't belong to her Daddy. "You're a little wet, but that can't be why you're acting so strangely." Still, Dakota ignored it, crawling into a patch of grass. Maybe it was there. "I've seen Kelsey get all silly and rowdy before, but you?"

Speaking of Kelsey, she and her Daddy came clomping back up to the fountain; Kelsey riding piggy-back on the big man's spine. "Sorry. She got away from me. Lost her shoes though."

Dakota ignored the grown-ups as she kept crawling, inch by inch. It was a new quarter, too! It should be super shiny and easy to see! The sun was blocked out by a cloud, however. Dakota looked up and noticed that the shadow was suspiciously Daddy shaped. He was hovering, actively paying attention to her every move. Making sure she didn't hurt herself or run off again. Any acknowledgement of his presence would only cost her time she didn't have.

Her stomach gurgled a bit, agreeing. No way was she going to have her panties filled to the brim when she changed the world back. That might not be an option, at this rate.

In the background she heard the Mommies and Daddies keep talking. "You're turn to change her," Kelsey's Daddy said to her Mommy.

Their patience wouldn't last long. She was running out of time. Dakota briefly glanced towards the fountain to see Susie sitting in her Mommy's lap on the edge of the fountain, her diaper already changed.

Kelsey took her Mommy's hand and walked bow legged and diaper dropping well beneath the hem of her dress towards the changing mat. "That was wild," the fat man said. "Kelsey led her back to where that event was the other day."

"No surprise there," Kelsey's Mommy agreed, taking a diaper bag with them.

“Yeah, but they had both stripped off their dresses.”

A knowing, almost nostalgic sigh came from Susie’s Mommy. “Oh, I remember when my Susie went through that phase. I want to say it was sixteen, or so.” Dakota stopped her search and stared in a kind of combined disgust and awe as Susie’s hair was ruffled and she nuzzled against her Mommy’s neck. “But Susie, doesn’t do that anymore, do you baby?”

“No, Mommy,” Susie said.

“Dressies-are-for-showin’-everybody-how-pretty-an’-nice-an’-lady-like-you-can-be.” That last part sounded more like a recitation of a rule than an actual opinion. A condescending pat on the head and a kiss on the cheek hammered that notion home.

Kelsey sat down on the changing pad, giving her backside a little wiggle and spreading the mess around an extra bit and giggling before allowing her Mommy to lay her all the way down on the fountain’s rim. “Hey, Susie,” she said, turning the penny over in her hands. “Look what ‘Kota gave me.”

Susie wriggled out of her Mommy’s lap, and held out the dime she’d snatched. “Me too!” Neither Mommy present took any notice of the girls’ exchange.

It seemed like the conversations between the grown-ups, and the conversation between the Forbies were on two distinct planes of reality. Kelsey neither flinched nor stammered as her Mommy lifted her legs and started wiping her messy bottom. She nudged her head to the fountain. “Wanna make a wish?”

Susie grinned. Dakota shrieked. The grown-ups paid almost no mind as she scrambled to her feet and confronted the other forever babies. “What’s wrong with you two?!”

“Dakota, we need to be nice to our friends, remember?” Almost all the grown-ups were disregarding them. It was a weak command from Daddy, trying to keep up appearances, but it made Dakota suddenly self-conscious all the same. She didn’t want to disappoint Daddy, did she?

“Nothin’,” Susie said, doing her own part to ignore the grown-ups. “What’s wrong with you, today?”

“Nothing is wrong with me!” Dakota insisted. “I’m a big girl!”

The messy diaper was balled up and put to the side. “Oh, I hear that phase is going around daycare,” Mrs. Kelsey’s Mom said to the grown-ups. Lots of nodding heads, agreed, as a fresh diaper was unfolded and slipped under Kelsey.

“Susie was doing that just the other day, actually.”

Possessed of an existential terror, Dakota pressed on. “Remember, yesterday, guys? The wish plan?”

“Where’s your wish coin?” Susie asked, squinting from behind her glasses. “Did you wish already?”

“She was sayin’ somefin’ ‘bout bein’ a big girl,” Kelsey said, now with a fresh cloud of powder being sprinkled on her bum. “Maybe that’s what she wished for.”

“No I haven’-!”

“That’s a silly wish,” Susie said over Dakota. “What baby would wanna be treated like a big girl?” Meanwhile, the fresh diaper was pulled up and over Kelsey, being taped into place.

Dakota tried to regain control of the conversation, and failed. “I didn’-”

“That’s why she’s acting so funny today!” Kelsey yelled. (Kelsey? Of all people to be cutting her off, it was Kelsey?!)

“That makes sooooo much sense!”

“Wanna fix her?”

“We HAVE to! She’s our bestest friend in the whole wide world!”

The two Forbies looked at each other and nodded. Dakota stood dumbfounded, mouth hanging open. “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” She lunged as their hands hovered over the sparkling pool.

Ploink! Ploink!

Daddy’s arms wrapped around her. “Now that’s enough. You calm down or...or...no sleepover!” Dakota thrashed and thrashed in Daddy’s grip, but. “Do not make me spank you!”

“How could you?!” she wailed to the two idiots directly in front of her. “How?! HOW?!”

Kelsey said, still laying down from her change, just giggled before inserting a row of fingers into her mouth. Susie awkwardly clapped her hands and gave a maniacal half-shriek half-giggle; as though she were on a roller coaster. She rocked back and forth on her heels; filled with so much toddlerish energy that her body just couldn’t quite let her stand still.

Possessed of an almost inhuman rage, Dakota managed to pry her Daddy's hands apart and escape his grasp, charging madly towards her two so-called 'friends'. She was going to kill them! She was going to drown them in that fountain! She was going to stuff their used diapees down their thro-

Dakota stopped dead in her tracks. Something was wrong. She needed to do something. But what? With decades of long practice, she stuck her behind out a bit and bent her knees; not squatting outright, but juuuuuust enough to get it aaallllll out.

Some strange part of her wanted to scrunch her eyes closed; to shut the world out and retreat deep into herself; to make the universe go quiet. Instead her eyes remained open. The world was so beautiful, and there was so much left to do and play with. Why waste a minute of the experience?

What was she doing again? What did she have to do? She had to do something, right? She knew the answer, of course (pooooo-oo-) but for some reason she couldn't quite accept it.

Big girls like her didn't go poo-poo in their panties. Did they? No. No they didn't. They didn't pee-pee in their panties, either, and Dakota had definitely done that; hadn't even had to think about it, really. Something about that didn't feel right either. She stuck her thumb back in her mouth to help her think, and was rewarded with pleasure. She so liked sucking on things.

Inside her diaper, her cheeks spread apart, and the first bit of mush started to push itself out. She clenched together, denying herself the release and the pleasure that was sure to follow. Something still wasn't sitting right with her, or her diaper. Diaper? Did she mean a diapee? It was a diapee, yeah? Something about that felt right. Dakota wasn't wearing panties, she was wearing a diapee. And she hadn't peed in her panties either, she'd just wet her diapee, and that was okay for big girls to do. It must be, because she was a big girl.

Mommy-wow! I'm-a-big-girl-now! The little jingle rattled off in her head, and Dakota grunted as she tried to hold on, (in more ways than one). Big girls wore panties, though, not diapees. Had she ever gotten to wear panties before?

Deep in her memory, she vaguely recalled trying something called "Pull-Ups" and "Training Pants", but she could never remember wearing panties. She remembered trying them, and not caring for the experience.

They had felt kind of like diapees, but not as thick; not as safe. And they leaked more. And she was supposed to change herself. Yuck. And for some reason, her Mommy and Daddy had started checking her more often, meaning she had less time to play. Less time to experience the world and play. Double Yuck. And when she had needed changing, they looked annoyed and sad. Triple Yuck.

Thinking to way back when, she remembered having all this 'big girl' stuff, that she never liked anyways stop working. Cups spillt. Shoes wouldn't tie no more. Pencils wouldn't stay still in her hand. Her bed wouldn't catch her from fallin' out. Her booster seat didn't hold her food. None of it worked right no more. Then, she got her diapees and highchair and paci and bottles and crib back. Everything had gotten betterer from there.

Dakota really never had been made to wear panties. She was special, Dakota remembered. Just like her friends. She was never going to have to grow up. She was a forever baby. No matter how old she got, there'd be no big girl problems for her; as she relaxed her cheeks, one last tiny thought flew out of her: (Ever again.)

She knew what she had to do. "FOOOFIE!" she cried out exuberantly from around her thumb. She let go and immediately felt the nice mushy stuff start to flow out of her and into the waiting seat of her diapee. This is what she had to do if she wanted to be happy. She pushed, and sucked on her thumb harder as she did it. Gotta help it along. The blonde Forbie gave an extra little grunt of determination and a push to help complete the job.

Big girls with all of their big girl problems wore panties. They weren't allowed to be little forever like her. That wasn't their job. It was hers, and she was very good at it. She was keenly, almost expertly aware as her diapee poofed out and sagged away from her, being part of her and not in that special way that only a Forbie could understand. Just a little more, she thought. And her hiney made funny noises, like it was thinking the same thing. All the while, warmth came out of her body, and a different kind of warmth traveled up to her brain, making her feel kind of silly and proud.

They were good feelings to have. "I ded et..." Dakota mumbled from behind her thumb, smiling all the while. Using her other hand, the precious Forbie reached back and squished her diapee, feeling the mush inside it press up against her.

"Is that was bothering you, Dakota?" Daddy asked her. "Were you constipated or something?" Dakota shrugged and giggled, as Daddy pulled back her diapee, and waved his hand in front of his nose. Silly Daddy. "Not anymore," he sad. (And never would again.)

Looking at the grown-ups crowding around her, Dakota did her best to get the most out of the situation, plopping down on her butt and feeling the delightful mush spread around a bit more. Then she leaned back on the bumpy ground and grabbed at her feets, wigglin' her cute little toesies as she rocked back and forth. "She's back to normal," she heard Susie say.

"I've got this one," Mrs. Susie's Mom tried to guide Dakota into a sitting position. Dakota whined and tried to rock back. She was a baby, not stupid. The mush wasn't even cold yet. She wasn't ready to get changed. "Dakota..." there was an edge in the grown-up lady's voice. "Be a good girl." The grown-up didn't have to say "Or else."

Daddy never spanked her....but Mrs. Susie's Mom? She just might. A final groan of disappointment rumbled out of Dakota before she sat up, stood up, and let the grown-up lead her to the changing mat like a good baby. There must've been somethin' in the grown up's eye, because it did this funny little blink at Daddy. "I'll have to change them all tonight, anyways."

Kelsey rolled off the changing mat, and her Mommy steadied her so she didn't fall backwards into the wishing fountain. Dakota laid down, and clever girl that she was, helped by lifting the hem of her dress past her belly-button. "We gotta thank you for volunteering for this," Kelsey's Mommy said. "It feels like forever since we've had a date night."

Date night? What was that? It sounded important, though Dakota couldn't quite figure out why. Her diaper opened up, and Mrs. Susie's Mommy started wiping her down. The lady was good. Almost as good as her own Mommy had been before she'd went away. "Actually," Daddy chimed in. "I got to thinking. This sort of thing was easy to do, back when the girls were five, or six, or even twelve. But this can't be easy, can it?"

"Oh it's no trouble at all," Mrs. Susie's Mommy said, not even looking up from Dakota's diapee. "Would you mind getting a new diaper?"

"Well, I was just thinking," Daddy said, handing a new diapee over. "I'm not gonna sleep over, but if you needed some help keepin' these little rascals busy, maybe I could help out until bedtime...?"

The two grown-ups looked at each other. Now Daddy had that funny blink thing going on.

"Um...Daddy?"

"Yes, Princess?"

"Can I finish my diapee change, now? I'm gettin' kinda chilly." Everybody laughed at that, even Susie and Kelsey. So did Dakota, though it was more to be polite than anything else. What was happening, wondered? She'd figure it out sooner or later. And if she didn't, it wasn't important. She now knew what was important.

## **EPILOGUE**

Two pairs of wrinkled hands came out and pinched Dakota's cheeks. "Oh my goodness! Aren't you the most adorable little forever babies that I've ever seen! So cute, and so well behaved!" Dakota and Susie couldn't help but giggle and blush as the two nice old ladies cooed at them and said nice things.

They were at the Biggie Burgers, having lunch. Dakota's daddy and Susie's mommy were on something called a 'lunch date', and so Dakota's sissy, Virginia, (that's what Dakota got to call her), had taken them out for a Forbie meal, a toy, and the super cool play place.

"I just wish my own grandchildren could be forever babies," the second old lady said, (whose hair might definitely not be a wig) "They're always so sweet. Mine were born just a little too early."

Sissy didn't even look up from her phone. "Yeah," she said. "Real tragedy to not develop beyond maybe a three year old. Your grandkids are reeeeeeally missing out."

"Are you their caregiver?" one of the old ladies (the one whose eye makeup matched her hair color) asked.

Sissy kept staring at her phone. "Yeah, but only until I can get a job caring for the elderly. Same difference, y'know? I mean, the diapers don't have as many cartoons on them." Sissy looked up from her phone and arched an eyebrow. "Wait...do they?"

"Well I never-!" One of the nice old ladies scoffed.

"First time for everything."

Any actual resentment, rudeness, or aggression went right over the heads of the two innocents sitting in the hard plastic booth across from Sissy. Susie and Dakota were trading bites of chicken nuggets and french fries with each other; they'd always been good at sharing. They barely noticed when the two nice old ladies left. They were too busy experimenting with dipping sauce as paint. Also, when it came to grown-up types, neither one was terribly interested in what one said to another. You didn't have to listen most of the time. It was one of the many great things about being a baby, not that they had any other experience to compare it too.

"Ugh," Sissy said. "Don't do that!" She grabbed a napkin from the dispenser and started wiping their brand new delicious face paint right off. "Gross."

While Sissy was cleaning her face up, Dakota's eyes wandered around the restaurant. A little girl, a real tiny one...not quite a tiny baby, not quite a big kid but DEFINITELY not a grown-up or



a forever baby, was moving all silly-like. She was hopping from foot to foot like that old hopscotch game. Left. Right. Left. Right. Left. Left. Right. Right.

And her knees were all wobbly like they wanted to touch each other, but the feet hopping wouldn't let 'em.

And her hands were down by her legs, like Susie sometimes did when her mommy told her 'no touching'.

It seemed kind of like a fun dance.

She just didn't seem to be havin' any fun with it. The look on her face made it look like she wasn't happy, like somethin' was makin' her sad or scared. "Mommeeeeeee," the tiny girl said. Why would the tiny girl dance if she didn't wanna dance?

The mommy stopped eatin' her burger, and grabbed the tiny girl's hand, walking both of them to a nearby bathroom. What was that all about. Still thinking about the girl's dance, Dakota started trying to make her own knees touch. A warm squish between her legs stopped her knees from touching, and a warmth on the inside of her clothes made itself known. A flurry of napkins constantly dabbing sauce paint away kept her from thinking too deeply about it.

"Sissy," Dakota asked, between wipes. "Can we go play now?" A napkin narrowly scraped her nose as she looked over to the playplace. They had a slide that went RIGHT INTO the ballpit. That had to be better than the magical play place Kelsey wouldn't hush-up about.

Without waiting, she slid out of the booth and took a step for the play place. Her new shoes lighted up pink with just a little bit of weight on them. Susie's own shoes were lighting up too, she was tapping her feet so fast.

Mrs. Susie's Mom had gotten them matching shoes a few "dates" ago. Daddy had gotten them the matching onesies they now wore with the little ruffles on the butt last "date". Heck, sometimes, if the grown-ups timed it right, even the decorations on their diapees matched. The grown-ups called it "twinning". Another silly word that the girl didn't know.

If only Susie's stuffed bunny matched them, it'd be perfect. Flopsy would look super cute with a ruffle butt. She'd probably fit in a tiny-baby-diapee too.

"Have you finished your food?" Sissy asked.

Dakota looked down at her pretty blinking shoes. "No..."

"Then sit down, squirt." The blonde Forbie didn't really notice it, but the squelching sound her diapee made when she sat back down explained why she was called 'squirt'.

"Fine," she huffed, and plunked another chicken nugget into her mouth.

Like she was at one of her fancy restaurant pretend games, Susie wiped her mouth (even though Sissy had already wiped everything off) and said, "I'm finished eatin'. Can I go play, Sissy?"

A surge of possessiveness flared red hot inside Dakota, and it showed. "Hey!" she snapped. "You're not allowed ta call her 'Sissy'! She's MY Sissy!"

This little incident had played out at almost every time that Sissy had Forbiesat them, especially when it was just the two of them and Kelsey with her Mommy and Daddy. When it was just Susie and Dakota, that's when they were more likely to be dressed up to look like each other. Dakota would figure it was because Susie had gotted confused about which one of 'em was which. The thing is, no matter how many times they did this little song and dance it almost always ended the same way:

"What am I supposed ta call her, then?" Susie asked, genuinely concerned.

Dakota thought for a moment. "Um....Virginia...no! Wait! Miss Virginia! No! Wait! Miss Dakota's Sissy Virginia. An' putta ma'am in there somewhere!" Dakota crossed her arms and nodded satisfactorily to herself. Susie's eyes darted from left to right, like she was memorizing a snack order at daycare.

"Miss Dakota's Big Sissy Virginia Ma'am," she said. "Got it."

"Ooooooh, I like the 'Big' you threw in there. Sounds 'portant!"

A deep, muffled laughter caught both of the girls' attention. Sissy was laughing, but it was like she was playing peek-a-boo: her hands were covering almost all of her face. "Sissy?"

Sissy shook her head, but she was smiling. "It's times like this that I have absolutely no doubt that we're related."

Dakota giggled. "Course we're related. You're my Sissy. That's why I get ta call ya Sissy, and Susie has ta call ya Missus Miss Dakota's Virginia...Missus Dakota's Sis-" She turned to Susie. "What was it again?"

"Miss-Dakota's-Big-Sissy Virginiaia Ma'am."

Sissy sighed in that way big people did when they thought they knew something you didn't. "Ya know what, girly-girl?" Sissy looked at Susie. "It's okay if you call me Sissy." Then, she said, "At this rate, it might be true soon enough."

Both of the forever babies balked. "Huh?"

"Y'know what?" Sissy said. "Never mind. Don't worry about it."

Without realizing it, Dakota squirmed a bit in her seat. "Kay kay."

A boy, not a cootie face like Brendan, but a big boy who wore big boy panties like Sissy came up to the table. "Excuse me, Miss," he said "I couldn't help but notice that you've got your hands full there. Do you need any help clearing these trays?"

The blonde Forbie was about to correct the big boy, by telling him to call Sissy by 'Miss-Virginia-Sissy-Queen-whatever-she-had-made-up-five-seconds-ago', but then she saw the little picture of Biggie Badger on his shirt pocket. He worked here, and Dakota knew to be nice to people who worked here, no matter where 'here' was.

Dakota watched as Sissy's entire face changed, and she leaned a little bit towards the big boy. "Oh, that would be awesome...?" Everybody was quiet for a second, ('cept maybe not Flopsy, but Flopsy only talked to Susie, anyways).

"Jason"

A jolt, like something was tickling her brain, flashed across the back of Dakota's noggin. "Jason..." Both sisters said the name at the same time, both with the same dreamy, half-dopey tone. Sissy looked at Dakota and laughed, but there was something in her eyes; something possessive; almost the same kind of look that Dakota had shot Susie a second ago. "This one's mine", the look said.

"Are these both your sisters?" the big boy, Jason, asked.

"One is," Sissy said. Dakota helped by bobbing up and down and pointing her thumbs at herself. Susie helped by staying out of it and whispering to Flopsy. "I'm sitting."

The big boy looked at Dakota and tickled under her chin. "I should've known," he said. "She looks just like you. She's a real cutie."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Something was different. When the two nice old ladies had called her and Susie cute, Dakota had giggled and smiled. She liked being paid attention to and being called cute. She liked

being called cute by this big boy- who had really big shoulders, and his nose looked a lot like Daddy's, and he even smelled a little bit like Daddy- but somehow she liked it in a different way.

She felt different.

She felt tingly.

Something in her diapee felt strange for a second.

"Y'know," Jason said, (such a handsome big-boy, not like poopy head Brendan), "Forbies are kinda lucky in a way."

Sissy nodded and smiled real big. "Y'know, I was thinking the exact same thing. They're always so sweet, and innocent."

"Yeah, and they don't have to work or nothin'," the big boy said. "Kind of a sweet deal." Now it was Dakota who was nodding. This big boy really got her. He really understood. More funny feelings coming from her diapee spot. These funny new feelings felt familiar to her somehow.

She began sucking on her thumb and fidgeting in her seat while the big people kept talking. The sensation of sucking calmed her and the familiar squish in between her legs made her feel good, almost good enough to stop thinking about the tingly feeling and this big boy talking to Sissy...almost.

Almost...

"So," the big boy said to Sissy, looking kinda nervous for some reason, "I'm sure you're getting paid big bucks to big baby sit, but I get paid today, too. Any chance I could give you call sometime? Maybe take you to a movie? My treat? After we both get off?"

Get off...

Something about that phrase had meaning to Dakota...though she wasn't sure why. She started to bounce and fidget more. The crinkling of her diapee drowning out all other sounds as she started talking to herself.

Get off...

She had to get off something, she knew deep down, but she wasn't sure what. Get off? She was supposed to stay at the table...she hadn't been excused. She was a good baby. She was a good...good...baby...not a naughty one...not naughty like...like...

Dakota stopped fidgeting, stopped crinkling. She lifted her butt just a little off the seat, just enough to make room and relieve the building pressure inside her; she wasn't leaving the table. She was still being a good baby. She was doing just enough to...to get... "Pooooooooooooooooo-!" The hot mess that filled up her diapee came hard and fast, causing the bottom half of her onesie to spread out a bit. The whole thing happened so fast, Dakota thought she felt a snap button pop down below, but it held. She sat down, smiling in pure happiness as the warm mush clung to her like mud on a warm summer day. "-piiiiiiiiiiiie!"

Wet diapees were nice, but nothing could beat a good poopie held up by a onesie with a cute ruffle butt. It was definitely a good day to be dressed inna onesie.

There. The feeling had passed. That's what she'd needed ta do. All better.

"DAKOTA?!" It was Sissy.

"Uh-huh?" Dakota giggled.

"Did you just have an accident?"

Dakota shook her head and told the truth. "No." It was only an 'accident' when big kids did it. When Dakota and her friends made boom booms, it was a 'supposed ta'.

"Um..." big boy Jason looked uncomfortable all of a sudden. His nose wrinkled a little bit. "Forbie accessible changing tables are that way." He pointed to an open door that Dakota could juuuuuust see through the metted nesh of the playplace.

Big Sissy started digging into her purse. "Hold that thought." A whole bunch of wish coins clattered on the table in front of the girls. "Dakota, Susie. Why don't you two go ride the mechanical horsies for a bit?"

"REALLY?!" Both Susie and Dakota shrieked. Neither Dakota's Daddy or Susie's Mommy or Sissy EVER let them go on the play rides that needed wishing coins! Neither girl had dared hope for such a thing. Maybe wishes DID come true, even if you never knew that you wished them.

Without waiting, the girls snatched up the coins and duck waddled over to the mechanical horsies. "We'll get more rides if we share," the tall cute blonde forever baby said. Dakota swung one leg over, enjoying the warm swish as she got on the big plastic pony. Soon there'd be a lot more squishing. She put one of her wishing coins in.

Susie nodded, and put one of her wishing coins in the slot, and climbed up behind the girl who she'd spent so much time lately with. Dakota giggled as Susie wrapped her arms around the taller girl's waist.

And then it started, each girl laughing and giggling as the horse galloped up and down...up and down...up and down...they'd really need a change after this; but for now it was fun to just enjoy the ride. Maybe wishing coins really grant wishes, but they could help you have fun.

"Um..." Jason said to Virginia. "Aren't you worried about her getting a rash or something?"

"They've been wearing diapers their entire lives," Virginia said. "They're used to it. Besides, Dakota will fight me on it, and I'm not in the mood." She leaned slyly over to the cute boy who'd just asked her out. "So...movie? What time?"

**RETROSPECTIVE: This is easily one of the longest and most difficult pieces that I've ever written. Three different P.O.V.s. Trying to make each character distinct and interesting and unique. A found footage narrative device gradually informing the readers, if not the main characters, of what's happened to the world. A fast build to diapers and babying and a slow burn into mental regression. WOOF, it was hard. Hard to the point where the title had a double meaning, both as the main plot point of a very delayed childhood wish and to the public as I kept pushing back release dates.**

**Seriously, just looking over this thing is exhausting to some degree.**

**There was:**

**Kelsey- Someone who probably would have been a Little if not an AB had she been a little less sheltered and eased into the kink.**

**Susan- Susan was supposed to be more of a Tomboy forced into girly things. The problem I had writing her was the flash nature of things. She's diapered in the first scene arguing with her mom. Didn't have much of a chance to establish her. So instead I leaned hard into the Mommy issues and wanting independence.**

**Dakota- Dakota for some reason was the breakout star of this based on the comment sections. Also probably the worst character, morally speaking, and the most likely to "deserve" this kind of treatment.**

**I also had to come up with a way for only the girls and people their age to be regressed. No, "everyone under 25 years old is a baby", both because of a logistics reason and because whelp...babies grow up eventually, even if the growing up is delayed. Hence Forbies.**

I am proud of the Forbie part. That was just something I cooked up on the fly. Slang happens, and giving it a more technical term like “Forever Baby” and then shortening it to “Forbie” made sense, and little things like that made the world feel more organic.

In terms of length and complexity this one might just be the benchmark that I’m hoping to top with my other works on this site.

**-Personalias**