

## Closed Door Policy

by Pan

### Chapter 1

The room stank.

It was a smell that I recognized.

Somehow, I managed not to say anything. It was a struggle - with every breath, I knew I was breathing in a part of my boss that I never, ever thought I'd encounter. Ugh! I don't like the taste or smell at the best of times, and to be surrounded by it in a professional environment was...well, it was something out of this world.

Ron didn't even look at me the whole time I was in the room, which was probably for the best - no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't wipe the disgusted look off my face. It was just so...well, *gross*. As soon as I'd passed on the message, Ron gave a nod, and I fled from the room and beelined for the one restroom on our floor.

###

I couldn't believe it when the boss told me.

Not that she's my boss. Not directly. I'm Ron's secretary, and she's Ron's boss. So while she's *the* boss, she's not *my* boss, if that makes sense.

"It's a very delicate problem," Miranda told me. She'd been waiting at my desk when I'd come in on Monday morning; she'd declined my offer of a tea or coffee, and launched straight into it.

I nodded politely, a small part of me wondering why Ron didn't just tell me this himself. "I don't want to go into too much detail, but he's taking some testosterone supplements and has been warned by the doctor that it's going to have some pretty strong side-effects."

I've never had much cause to talk to Miranda, but of course I admire her. She started the company herself when she was just 21 years old, and now, a mere ten years later, we've got offices all over the state. She's a real go-getter, and she's never let her gender hold her back.

"Basically," she said, biting her lip slightly, "it's affecting his libido. And so Ron has asked me - and I've given him permission - to take care of matters inside the office."

My eyes widened as I realized what she was saying.

"I know," she smiled sympathetically. "It sounds weird. But he's told me what his doctor said. If he doesn't get off throughout the course of the day, it can be dangerous to his treatment. Normally in a case like this, he'd take medical leave, but..."

I nodded. We'd just landed our largest contract yet, and taking a few weeks off right now wasn't an option for any of us.

"In practice," she continued, "this shouldn't have an effect on day-to-day business, but because the bathrooms here are shared, we're going to implement a simple closed door policy. If Ron's door is shut, don't interrupt - for any reason. Does that make sense?"

I nodded again, even as my head reeled. Was Miranda really saying what I thought she was saying?

With a smile, she thanked me for my support on this tricky issue, and walked out the door. As she left, I admired the black business suit she was wearing. When I'd started at the job, I'd worn skirts, stockings - the kind of stuff that men typically expect of their young female secretaries - but after I'd seen the way Miranda dressed, I'd decided to emulate her as best I could.

No more skirts, no more bright colors - no more cleavage, which anyone would confirm was quite a departure from my usual style. No, it was all pants and pant-suits, and I've got to tell you - it had really changed the way people treated me.

Especially Miranda. Maybe that was why she'd chosen to pass on the message herself? We'd only met a few times since my dress-code change, but I swear I've felt a growing

respect from her.

Or, just as likely, Ron was simply too shy to say anything.

When he came in half an hour later, he couldn't even make eye-contact. He mumbled a hello, and as soon as I'd finished summarizing his meetings for the day, scurried into his office...and closed the door.

Ron's a sweet guy, and an excellent boss. But he's the most shy man I've ever met, especially around women. I've only met his wife the once, and I genuinely have no idea how they got together - she's a brash bombshell of a woman. Hot as hell, and simply awful. She runs a chain of dry cleaners or something like that - I imagine their home life consists of Ron going home each night and getting his ear talked off while he gives her a foot massage.

That's just a guess, of course - what do I know? Maybe they're into BDSM, and Ron goes home each night and ties her up and spansks her.

As I stared in shock at the closed door, I couldn't help but feel that a testosterone boost was exactly what Ron needed. Poor guy.

Right then and there, I vowed to make the situation as comfortable for him as I could. I'd do what Miranda said, of course, but if there was anything else I could do, I'd do it. He was a good guy, and he deserved all the support I could give him.

###

It was forty-five minutes before his door re-opened. I'd held all his calls, exactly as instructed. My mind was spinning. Forty-five minutes! I'd never had a boyfriend who could last more than twenty.

Not that I'd ever think of Ron in that sense, of course, but I couldn't help be impressed.

When it finally opened, my boss looked...flustered. I wasn't surprised. We both knew exactly what he'd been doing, and we both *knew* that we both knew exactly what he'd been doing.

His eyes darted around, and he squeaked an apology.

"Of course," I said, smiling warmly. I was determined to make this as easy for him as I possibly could. "Do you want your messages?"

Ron nodded, but blanched when I stood up. His reaction took me by surprise, and I froze.

"We can do it out here," I eventually said, when it became obvious that my boss wasn't going to fill the silence.

His grateful nod reminded me of why I was doing this. Ron was a sweet guy. I really wanted this to be as easy for him as possible.

I was met with nothing but silence as I relayed the content of the calls he'd missed. When I was done, I expected a thanks, or a grateful nod. Y'know; *something*.

Instead, to my great surprise, he scurried back into his office...and closed the door once more.

My eyes widened and what he was doing sunk in. Had he...after we...

Wow.

I took a deep breath, and tried to swat back the judgmental thoughts. For all the time I'd worked there, Ron had been nothing but completely professional.

I'm an attractive girl. I've always known it. If the leers from strange men weren't enough of a reminder, all I needed to do was glance down. Even under the professional garb I wear to the office, my tits are impossible to hide.

But I swear, I've never seen Ron so much as glance at them, even when I used to wear my favorite cleavage tops. Most men struggle to make eye-contact...well, Ron has that trouble too, but it's not because he's staring at my breasts.

No, Ron was a good guy. This had nothing to do with me; it was a medical issue. It was

exactly what Miranda had warned against - his new drugs meant that he didn't have a choice.

It wasn't his fault.

I was going to help him get through this.

###

The pattern repeated itself several times that day. After more than half an hour of door-closed time, Ron would pop out for just long enough to hear the messages he'd missed...and then disappear back into his office, and close the door again.

*It's a medical issue*, I had to keep reminding myself. *It has nothing to do with me.*

The fourth time it happened, I was starting to get a little frustrated. We had deadlines coming up, and Ron's condition was making this the least productive day I'd ever seen in this office.

I knew it wasn't my job to manage the manager, but I was at a total loss. Ron needed my help, and aside from 'not judging him', I had no idea what I could do.

It wasn't like I could go to Miranda and tell her that Ron was spending the whole day jerking off in his office. I mean, it was hardly news - she'd just told *me* that. Besides, what could she do? It was a medical issue.

The end of the day arrived sooner than I expected. I waited for Ron to come out, which took less time than I expected. Maybe he was finally running out of steam? Maybe he'd get it all out of his system today, and tomorrow we'd be back to business as usual.

Less than fifteen minutes since he'd closed it, Ron opened his door and emerged looking sweaty and nervous. I quickly relayed the last few messages and wished him a good night as I grabbed my coat.

He didn't respond, and when I turned back to see why...the door was closed once more.

###

The next day was mostly a repeat of the first. When I got into work, the door was closed, and again, I only saw Ron a few times, each time for long enough to give him his messages and watch him fail to make eye-contact.

As I read him the messages, I couldn't help but notice some subtle changes in the man. Was he...taller? Men are taller than women, so I guess it makes sense that testosterone would add some height. Or perhaps he was just slouching less than usual.

Without the usual stream of little tasks from my boss, I was able to get ahead on those jobs that keep on piling up. For the first time in months, I managed to hit Inbox Zero, and got our monthly reports down to Florida before the accounting team had to chase us up.

On Wednesday, Ron spent slightly less time with the door closed. I wasn't sure if he was adapting to the treatment, or if he was just getting quicker.

Then, just after lunch on Wednesday, we got an urgent call.

It was the client.

"I'm sorry," I said sympathetically. "I'm afraid that Ron is on another call right now...-"

Before I could finish the thought, the client's voice was screaming down the line, so loudly that I had to move the receiver away from my ear.

"Of course," I said. "Yes. Yes, of course - I'll get him for you straight away."

Miranda had been very clear - when Ron's door was closed, he was *not* to be interrupted.

But this client was more than 35% of our annual avenue. If she left us, I'd be fired. Hell, Ron would probably be fired. The entire branch could be shut down.

I wanted to help Ron, I really did. But the best thing I could do for him right now was ensure that the client was happy.

Shutting my eyes and taking a deep breath, I knocked firmly on the door to Ron's office. Then, when there was no response, I knocked again.

Opening the door, I called out.

“Sir...”

I’d never called Ron ‘sir’ before in my life, but this seemed like an appropriate time to start.

“Sir,” I repeated. “I’m coming in. Please, sir...make sure that you’re decent?”

###

As as I left Ron’s office and began running for the bathroom, I gulped down as much air as I could. Clean, fresh air. Air completely untainted by...

God, what had I expected? I have no idea what I’d expected. Almost three straight days of...well, no wonder the room stank.

It *stank*.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I’ve had boyfriends. It’s not a smell I’m unfamiliar with. I’ve never been particularly fond of it, truth be told, but I like men. I *really* like men.

And when you really like men in the way that *I* really like men, that smell is something you come to terms with.

My high-school boyfriend - Nico - was my first. And before me, he’d...well, he’d done basically what Ron had done. By himself, in his room, over and over in a day.

It had reeked. I mean, it *really* stank. I think his parents only let him get away with it out of awkwardness.

But even Rico’s room, with its teenage hormones and endless bouts of self-pleasure...it hadn’t even come *close* to the smell of Ron’s office.

As soon as I got to the bathroom, I threw up. I kneeled down and delivered the contents of my stomach directly into the toilet bowl.

And even after I washed my mouth out with water, applied some perfume, AND brushed my teeth with my emergency desk-toothbrush, I still couldn’t shake it. Even with my desk-fan on high, it still stuck around like...well, like a bad smell.

Ron’s a good guy. He’s a good boss, a good man. He’s always been decent, and I knew how hard this was for him. I wanted to do everything I could to help...but, god.

No office could be allowed to smell like that.

I knew I had to do something.

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Chapter 2

The next morning, I got in before Ron, and discreetly installed a pair of air fresheners in his office. A pair of ‘Extra-Strength Potency’ dispensers...basically the most powerful-sounding name I could find.

I ran into our cleaning lady while I was there, Mrs Witsen. She had just finished vacuuming Ron’s office, and as I smiled “Good morning” at her, I noticed she looked slightly ill - Ron’s office has no opening windows, and so the room still reeked.

It wasn’t as bad as yesterday, I was relieved to discover. I guess he’d left the windows open all night, to help air out the smell, plus whatever Mrs Witsen had done.

They only took a minute to install before I was out of there. I didn’t know if my new addition to his office would completely mask the smell, but I was sure that it couldn’t hurt.

Weirdly enough, as I sat down at my desk, I found myself taking a big whiff of my clothes. *Just checking to make sure I don’t smell*, I told myself.

Yeah. That was all it was.

It wasn’t long before Ron arrived, avoided eye-contact, and immediately closed the door to his office. Rolling my eyes, I wondered why he couldn’t just “take care of business” at

home in the morning. Maybe his wife was refusing to help? Or maybe the medication was particularly strong in the morning, something like that.

Or hell, maybe he *had* taken care of it at home. Based on yesterday's frequency, he seemed to need to go *all the time*. Good thing Miranda had come up with the closed-door policy; if he'd been using our shared restroom, that would have pretty quickly caused a problem.

Again, it was about 45 minutes before Ron sheepishly opened his door. I took a deep breath, and entered the room to give him the messages that I'd taken while he was...while he'd had the door closed.

Entering the room, I was amazed to discover that the smell was somehow *worse* than it had been yesterday. It took all my self-control not to gag on the spot. All I wanted to do was run out of the room and deeply breathe the clean, air-conditioned air at my desk...but I had a job to do, and I knew I had to persevere.

I stood there, trying desperately not to breathe, as I relayed the messages. When I was done, Ron nodded, and I left the room.

He didn't need to tell me to close the door behind me.

That day was largely the same as the first. I couldn't tell you why, but I made a resolve to deliver all of Ron's messages in his office. Maybe it was to ensure that he didn't feel ostracized, like a freak - it was my job to help him get through this difficult time, after all.

Maybe it was to convince myself that the air fresheners had been a good idea, and hadn't just resulted in a combination of *two* terrible smells.

I don't know. And it didn't really matter. All that mattered was helping Ron.

Roughly once every forty minutes, Ron would CC me on an email, or send me a note directly. Whenever he did, I knew that he was...done. That it was safe to go in.

And so I'd knock on the door, wait for the all-clear, and then enter and recount his messages, maybe ask for guidance on whatever task I was working on.

It didn't take long - maybe two or three minutes - before Ron would go beet-red and start to sweat, and I'd take the unspoken hint and leave him to...take care of himself.

Forty minutes later, this pattern would repeat.

The more I went into Ron's office, the greater sympathy I had for him. Like, at least I was able to get stuff done when I wasn't delivering messages (not that delivering messages isn't, like, getting stuff done). My poor boss's productivity must have been completely shot - honestly, I was starting to get worried that he wouldn't be up to meeting our new client's needs.

No. I wouldn't let that happen. No matter what, I was going to help Ron get through this, whatever he was going through.

The more I went into Ron's office, the less the smell bothered me, too. I guess it just took some getting used to. By lunchtime, I was breathing normally in Ron's office.

By the time six o'clock rolled around, I was almost enjoying the smell.

Not, like, *enjoying* the smell. I didn't want to use it as perfume or anything like that. But - except for the weird way it mixed with the air fresheners - it really wasn't so bad. It was natural, you know?

I'd never enjoyed the smell of Nico's room, per se, but he was on the school's hockey team and sometimes we'd hang out after practice. After a few hours on the ice, Nico really built up a sweat, and he wasn't exactly the type to wear deodorant.

And I *loved* it. He smelled like a *man*, and that made me feel like a woman, y'know?

Um, not that Ron was making me feel like a woman, of course. It was just a nice smell. I mean, not *nice*, but not as bad as I'd found it the previous day.

It was natural, is all. It was a natural, manly smell, and I could definitely imagine worse

things to be surrounded by.

When I was sitting at my desk between visits, I almost missed it.

I was packing up, getting ready to go, when Miranda stopped by.

“Is Ron...”

“In his office,” I smiled back.

I was halfway out the door when I realized. God - without the exposure to it all day, Miranda was going to be *appalled* by the smell. I should have warned her! Or warned Ron. Or, or, or...

Sitting in my car, I forced myself to take several deep breaths, to calm myself down. The smell of Ron’s office must have permeated my clothes or something, because I found myself smelling him, smelling the pungent odor of his office.

And for reasons I can’t explain...it helped. It helped calm me down, helped remind me that Ron didn’t need me to defend him. He was a *man*.

I was there to help him. To serve him.

Like, as his secretary. You know what I mean.

He could more than handle Miranda; of that, I was certain.

###

I was surprised to find Miranda waiting at my desk when I got to work the next day. She’s normally in once or twice a week, but definitely not every day.

And I don’t think I’d ever before seen her three days in a row.

“Looks like we can’t get rid of you!” I joked, wincing as soon as the words left my mouth. God, what a dumb thing to say, especially to your boss.

I would never have said anything like that to Ron.

“I met with Ron last night,” she said, ignoring my attempt at humor - thank god. She was wearing a grey skirt and a chic green sweater - I couldn’t help but admire her legs as she spoke. “For almost two hours. Since you weren’t there, I tried to take notes. Are you able to type them up for me?”

“Of course,” I nodded. I was amazed that Ron had managed to go so long without... well. “Is there anything I should be aware of?”

Miranda paused, before leaning in.

“Ron trusts you, and so do I. This doesn’t leave this office, understand?”

“Of course.”

“We’re worried about keeping the new client. Ron’s...condition...means that he hasn’t been able to keep on top of everything.”

For some reason, Miranda’s attention drifted away for a moment, but she quickly collected herself and continued.

“You know what a big deal this contract is, and you know that Ron’s going to do all he can. Just...do everything you can to help him, okay?”

“Of course,” I said earnestly. “If you can think of anything further I can do, let me know.”

For a second, I thought I felt Miranda’s eyes flick down my body, but before I could be sure if I was imagining it, she continued.

“Of course,” she echoed back to me. “But you know how much we value initiative in this company. If you can think of anything that will help, I want you to go for it.”

“Yes ma’am,” I responded, blushing slightly as I did. ‘Ma’am’. Miranda was barely a decade older than me. “I’ll keep my brain peeled.”

Miranda shot me an odd look. By the time I realized what I’d said, she was gone.

God. My cheeks could not have been redder. I’d bookended that conversation with embarrassing exchanges. Way to impress the boss, hey?

For the rest of the morning, I tried to take Miranda's words to heart. Anything I could think of that would help the company, that would help Ron, I did. I got so engrossed in my work, I totally forgot to take him his messages - it was lunchtime before I realized my mistake, leaping to my feet and practically running into Ron's office.

"Oh my god! I'm so, so sorry."

As quickly as I'd run into my boss's office, I left again.

I'd forgotten to knock.

I'd been so worked up about getting Ron his messages, I'd completely forgotten to knock.

I'd broken the closed-door policy.

I hadn't seen anything, thank god, but...I mean, it was pretty clear *what* I hadn't seen.

And if not seeing it wasn't enough, the smell.

The *smell*.

It was obvious that Ron had...just...

Or was in the middle of.

Either way, the smell was so much stronger than yesterday - almost strong enough to completely overpower those damn air fresheners. I should have come in early again just to remove them.

I waited a minute, to collect myself, then knocked, waiting for the all-clear before I entered.

"I'm so sorry about that, sir," I said, trying to sound cool and collected. Trying to sound more like Miranda. "Won't happen again. I have your messages."

Despite the fact that the smell was so much more stronger than the day before, it still wasn't bothering me. By the time I finished the messages, I was practically gulping it in.

"That's all, sir," I said, giving a weird little half-bow as I started to leave the room. What the hell was wrong with me? "Do let me know if there's anything else you need."

I closed the door behind me.

I skipped lunch that day. Ron needed my help. The company needed my help. Instead, I checked my emails for the first time that day.

That was when I noticed something unusual.

For the past two days, Ron's email output had been sporadic. Like I said, I had been basically using email to know when he was...available. He'd send nothing for half an hour or more, then send two or three in a row. I'd been using those as a cue to know it was safe to deliver his messages...and then there'd be another half-hour gap.

That morning, I hadn't been checking my inbox (I'd been going through the specs that the client had sent - my job involves some light proof-reading, and I knew this was time-sensitive) or delivering Ron's messages.

And all morning, Ron had been steadily sending emails out.

Not to me - I guess he'd realized I was busy with the specs. But he CC's me on anything important, so that I can know what he's up to (and add appointments to his calendar, etc).

Looking more closely, I could see that he hadn't been emailing *all* morning. Over the course of the day, he'd taken at least two or three half-hour breaks.

But it was a marked difference from yesterday, when the half-hour breaks had taken up the vast majority of his day.

I noted it as odd and went back to proof-reading. It's such a boring job, it's nice to have a puzzle of some kind for your brain to chew on while you do.

I'd reached the last document when it hit me. I sat bolt upright, eyebrows raised.

Ron's inability to focus yesterday, and the day before. His need to...close his door, over and over and over again.

Had that been because of...me?