

## **The Rehabilitation of Kylie**

Written by Max Harper

Part Four: Socialization

Lori had barely gotten in the door from her workday when her phone went off. It was a text message from Mark. She glanced at it as she set her purse and keys down and darkened her phone for the moment. She inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly. She had just completed one of the longest days she could remember. Her new job at the Institute was far more than she had realized it would be. Placed high on the chair of review personnel for new clients, Lori's job was to evaluate who was qualified for the Fresh Start program. Many were just people that needed to seek normal, professional therapy. She wasn't sure where her opinion on others was knowledgeable enough to make such decisions. What she had done with her daughter hardly made her an expert, but after she had read over the contract and spoke to Human Resources, the money she was going to be offered was far more than she had anticipated.

Her first day was paperwork and shadowing Shannon, who did little to explain what metrics the applicants would be measured by. Today, her second day, she was given a stack of applicant files and an office. Shannon told her to go with her gut and mark any applicant as a potential and she would review them at the end of the week. What started as a small stack of maybe a dozen files, turned into hundreds and Lori was quickly overwhelmed by looking through psyche evaluations and other recommendations.

She slipped out of her heels and felt the world raise up three inches. She chastised herself for dressing to the nines for her second day. Most of her coworkers wore more leisurewear and tennis shoes. What dress code may have been mentioned in her copy of the employee handbook, Lori had seen that many weren't following it. Still, she was raised to always look her best in a professional setting so nothing would change, no matter how bad her feet hurt. She softly walked to the kitchen and poured herself a glass of red wine and returned to the living room. Sitting in her recliner, she propped her feet up and finally read the entirety of Mark's message.

His request was simple, but a painful reminder of how quiet her life was. He was asking for Kylie's stuffed duck, Quackers. She felt a tinge of regret for everything that had happened between her and Kylie and she wondered how her daughter was doing. Kylie had stated that she wanted to apply to the Institute's regression program as a way to get the most benefit while taking the pressure and responsibility off of her mother. Lori knew that she was barred from seeing Kylie or having any direct communication with her. Parents or friends were viewed as a distraction and could be detrimental to her treatment.

Sipping on her wine, Lori wondered what she should do. She could respond to the text and leave it at that, or she could call Mark and have a conversation with someone other than herself. She had cleaned Kylie's room after she had left, and Lori found herself already missing her daughter. She had packed away all of the baby stuff that she had gotten for Kylie and left the rest of the room looking as if a normal adult lived in it. Perceptions and imagery. Falsehood and facades. That's all that Lori had left now. She wasn't sure if the Institute was a viable solution to Kylie's issues, but Lori had her reservations that anything that would really change for her.

Her wine glass empty, Lori went back to the kitchen for a refill before working her way to Kylie's room. Quackers was still where she had left it, between Kylie's double pillows. Lori recalled how innocent Kylie had looked sleeping in her bed, clutching the stuffed toy. There was a moment when Lori had the epiphany to look past Kylie's issues and just enjoy being needed. The memory faded and Lori was left with a hollow feeling. She grabbed the toy and closed Kylie's room back off. There was nothing there for her anymore. She gulped down the rest of her second glass of wine before she fumbled for her phone. She hastily dialed Mark's number and did her best to compose herself.

"Hello?"

"Greetings, Mark. It's Lori. I thought it best to call."

"Absolutely. Texting is so impersonal. How is the new job going?"

“Fine, I suppose. I’m not sure that I’m making the right calls but I’m doing my best. Shannon oversees anything I do, anyway, so hopefully, I can learn from her.”

“Shannon is great at her job and a wonderful person. She will show you all of her tips and tricks, I’m willing to bet.”

“That’s great to hear. I want to show everyone that I can do this job.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about other people’s perceptions. Moira chose you specifically, and everyone in that branch knows that. They will all do their best to help you out. They want to show nothing but absolute faith in her and her decisions.”

“I don’t want preferential treatment because of this, however.”

“You won’t. Moira is strict but fair. No one gets special treatment from her. Your placement in the company is a direct result of your ability to read into the situation you have in your own home and make the calls that fit in best with our company focus. Sounds like a bunch of PR bullshit, but it’s true. What you did with Kylie was nothing short of remarkable, from our perspective and you have earned your place with us because of it.”

“I don’t see what I did as being that remarkable.”

“You don’t. But we do. Don’t shortchange yourself, Lori. There are very few people that could have pulled off what you did.”

“I just wanted to help her.”

“And that’s the point! All we are here to do is to help individuals like Kylie to become the best of themselves that they can be. Sure, our methods and tactics may not be what the normal public would see as proper, but our results speak for themselves.”

“What results? I don’t mean to sound critical, but I’ve heard about all of these so-called results, but I’ve never met someone who can personally speak to their efficacy.”

“Would that put your mind at ease?”

“Is that possible?”

“It is. There are several people that I can think of whose own experiences would do much to lessen your concern.”

“Who said that I was concerned?”

“Your tone of voice does. You are worried about her and worried that she may have made the wrong decision. A decision that you forced her into and you are feeling guilty about it. It’s normal.”

“I wish that I could see her or talk to her.”

“You know that’s not possible.”

“I know. It’s not easy being helpless in these types of situations. What I can say she is in the best care that she can get. Dr. Duncan is one of the best in the business and I have worked closely with her on several occasions.”

“Duncan? You mean Donna? That woman we met for lunch?”

“The very same.”

“Is she...you know...good?”

“You mean to ask if she’s kind? She is. Donna’s approach comes from care and patience. She’s helped quite a few people and she will be the best thing possible for Kylie. There are other approaches, ones that are best not discussed right now. But I can arrange for you to talk to one of our successes.”

“I think that would be best. Just to help ease my mind.”

“I will make some calls. Meet me at the pharmacy after you get off work tomorrow. And bring the stuffed toy. You would be amazed at how a little piece of home helps the therapy stick.”

“I will do that. Thanks again, Mark.”

“Always here to help, Lori. Goodnight.”

Lori hung up the phone and stared at Quackers. She hoped that he was right and this little piece of home was enough to console Kylie. She hoped that everything she had done would work out well for her daughter. Even more, she hoped that she would be able to have a relationship with

her daughter when all of this was over. She remembered what she had said and her ultimatum. She hoped that she hadn't pushed Kylie too far away. She hoped for a lot of things.

Lucy had lost track of time. It was easy to do these days. She had been moved one night from the room she was tied down in. She didn't know where she was or how much time had passed. All she knew was an overwhelming sense of fear and dread mixed with despair. Her situation just kept going from worse to terrible. Now, instead of being tied to the bed, she was secured with strange things that she couldn't identify. She was blindfolded, still gagged, and her hands were covered. There was something around each of her knees, folding them at a ninety degree angle, making her unable to walk. There was also something like a bar tied between her ankles, keeping her legs from fully closing and something wrapped around her neck. It jingled every time she moved around. The final humiliation was that she was still diapered. She could touch it with her covered hands and could hear it crinkle. She didn't know how often it was changed, but each time she woke up, it was new and dry.

She had little to do with her time, save for flopping around. Whatever room she was in, it offered her more freedom than she had previously, but there were hard, rail like boundaries that kept her from going too far. She hadn't eaten in days and was weak from hunger. She had cried herself to sleep far too many times to count. She was miserable and she was breaking. Her will, dulled by the hunger, was fading fast. If she could somehow reason with the woman that kept her hostage, she would comply with whatever order she was given, provided she could eat.

A door opened and Lucy heard the menacing click of heels. Her captor had returned.

"Now, now. There you are. I hoped that you would be more settled in by now, but you have proven to be quite a tough nut to crack." The woman said. She messed around with something before Lucy felt her pull on something. Blinding light burned through Lucy's eyes as the woman removed the blindfold. Lucy clamped her eyes shut before slowly opening them, adjusting to the harsh light. The woman was on the other side of some bars that ran vertically. She had set a tray of food down on a small table and was daintily sitting down on a table chair.

Lucy looked around the room trying to get a bearing on where she was. Pastel colors covered practically everything and the whole room looked like one of those nurseries that she had seen in her mother's magazines. The bars ran around a large mattress and it took a moment but Lucy finally realized what she was in. A crib, large enough for several adults.

Outside the bars, there were several pieces of furniture that looked like enlarged versions of items used to care for babies. Changing table, playpen, high chairs, the works. The room looked set up to handle up to four persons at once but there was only Lucy. She took inventory of herself. Her hands were bound with mittens with rings around the wrists so that they could be secured down. Her feet were bound by a spreader bar, something she had seen in one of those horny movies her friends watched. She was indeed diapered, but with what looked like plastic pants covering it and a small lock hovering just under her navel. Her knees were wrapped up in what looked like pink tape. It kept her from stretching her knees out and therefore, she was unable to stand. Kneeling on the soft mattress and well aware that the woman outside the bars held all the chips, Lucy stared down her captor. The woman was wearing an older style homemaker's dress. Something that Lucy expected to see from the old retro shows that her father watched. Prim and proper, the woman carried herself with an elegant dignity.

"Are we ready to listen? I see that you have taken a moment to realize where you are and what sort of situation you are in. I have also noted that you have spied the food I have brought. It looks quite yummy if I do say so myself. Are you hungry?"

Lucy nodded fervently, inching closer to the bars.

"Good. I'm sure that we can reach an understanding then. Now, before you get it into your head that I'm torturing you, let's be clear that I'm not. It has been only twenty four hours since you came under my care. That's not nearly enough time for your health to be at risk or for you to suffer any long term starvation.

“With that said. I want to take this time to offer you a truce. You have clearly seen that I have the upper hand. My concern is that I don’t want our time together to continue this way. It can and it will, should you so choose, but I would prefer the easier approach.

“Therefore, I am willing to offer you a compromise. Food for compliance. You do and behave how I say and you will eat. Simple as that. That’s my compromise. Everything else stays the way it is. Understood?”

Lucy glared at her but the audible growl in her stomach curbed her defiance. She nodded defeatedly.

“I’m glad we have reached an understanding. Now, I will take off the gag, but I’m warning you, any sort of talk like last time and you will be fed through a tube. If you wish to speak, it will be with respect, am I making myself clear?”

The smell of the food hit Lucy’s nostrils and weakened the fight in the young girl. She needed to eat and the rules were simple. She nodded again with tears running down her face. “There, there. There is no reason to cry. I’m not as bad as all of that. I’m sure that you will find that I am quite agreeable once you get to know me.” She rose from her chair and took a few steps to get closer to Lucy. She reached through the bars and slowly undid the clasps that held Lucy’s gag in place. Before releasing the last one, the woman pressed one finger to Lucy’s gagged lips. She looked at Lucy sternly before undoing the last clasp. She kept her gaze as she slowly pulled the rubber bulb from Lucy’s lips.

Every fiber in her being wanted to scream as many vulgarities and insults that she could muster, but Lucy kept quiet, stretching her jaw and moving her tongue around. Her anger and rage were being pushed down the best that she could. She didn’t want to be gagged again, the muscles in her face were sore from being gagged for so long and all she wanted was to eat.

Something, anything more than her own saliva.

“I see that we have reached an understanding.”

“Who are you?”

“I am Penny Carver and for the time you are in my care, I will be your caregiver.”

“In your care? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That means that for the duration of your time in the Institute, I am responsible for your Rehabilitation.”

“And my father put you up to this?” “No. Your father requested this.” “Because of that night at the ball?”

“Among other things, yes. He has been most displeased with your behavior and has enrolled you in our program to correct such.”

“All of this...because of Kylie Gillis?”

“No. Not because of Kylie. The incident at the ball was the last straw, but you have been on our radar for a long time now.”

“What does that mean?”

“What do you think it means?”

“That I’m your prisoner in some sick, fetishistic way.”

“I see your wit has not been dampened. You are not a prisoner. Not in the terms that you are used to. Can you leave this place? No. Can you change how you are presented to the world each day? No. Did you commit some great crime? No. These are the ideals of criminal prisoners. What you are, is something entirely different. You are a prisoner within yourself.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“What that means is that the only way you get out of here is with true reform. The person that you are now, the person that got you into this situation, is no longer acceptable in modern society. That vulgar narcissism will not pass for cute anymore. And I fully understand how you got this way. Young girl, hot body, rich daddy, it’s all easy to put together, but you can’t go through life on your looks or your father’s money. All will fade in time. What you need, is a new outlook on life and the tools and knowledge to obtain your goals without such superficial means.”

“True reform?”

“Yes. You see, I don’t sugar coat things like other caregivers do, so here is the brutal, honest truth. You have been enrolled in the Fresh Start program. What that is is a form of behavior therapy in which a caregiver, me, will use all the tools of my trade to regress you back to an infantile nature so that you can be rehabilitated from the prissy, bitchy brat that you are, into a respectful, caring, and compassionate individual who can function appropriately in modern society.

“I will accomplish this by treating you like the baby you are. Diapers, pacifiers, bottles, you name it, I have it, and I will use it. The adult version of you is no longer acceptable.”

“But I’m not a baby. I’m a twenty year old woman!”

“Physically, yes. Maturity wise, not so much. You must understand that this can go one of two ways. I can restrain you to the point where you are as helpless as an infant, feed you through a tube and change your diapers as needed. In a few months, you will lose all sense of bladder control, in a year, bowel control, and you will be as physically capable as a baby, with muscle degradation setting into the point where you will no longer be able to walk. In essence, a complete and utter baby, totally self reliant on the care of others for your most basic of needs. A physical shell of who you used to be.”

Lucy gulped, her eyes widening at the horrible thought of being reduced to nothing.

“Or, you can make it your prerogative to change yourself. This program is not intended for such cruelty, although it could be used as such. The easy road involves your direct participation. You have to want to get better by truly understanding what needs to happen for long lasting, permanent change.”

“What if I don’t want to change? What if I don’t think that there is anything wrong with me?”

“Then we have nothing further to discuss. Although I think you are just kidding yourself. If you want me to believe that you are happy with the way you are and how your life is turning out, then you best convince yourself of that before trying to convince others. With that being said. I will give you till morning to make your decision.” Penny stood up and headed for the door.

“Wait! What about the food?”

“That? Oh, that was for the good girl that wants a better life, not the spoiled, rich cunt who thinks she’s perfect.”

“I-”

“I don’t deal in sass and attitude. Clearly twenty four hours wasn’t enough for you to do some personal reflection. We will try again tomorrow.” She pulled out a small device and clicked a few buttons just as Lucy’s temper went off. The young girl started screaming as soundproof glass descended from the ceiling, encompassing the crib and cutting off the racket. Penny walked over to an intercom and held a button, speaking into the microphone.

“I also don’t deal with temper tantrums. Cry, scream, carry on, I don’t care. There isn’t a person in this world that can hear you. Do you see the clock over here on the wall? It’s 9 A.M. I will be back this time tomorrow.”

Lucy stopped screaming. There was no point. Penny couldn’t hear her and didn’t care. She ran on her knees as far as she could to the side of the crib, reaching through the bars with her mittened hands, trying in to show her remorse. Penny held down a different button and Lucy’s pleas for clemency filtered through the small speaker. She promised change and promised to do whatever she was told. Penny smiled. They were mostly lies. They always were. But they were also a sign. Lucy didn’t want to fathom the alternative so she was willing to give in to avoid that grim fate.

Penny released the button and silence filled the room. She debated letting Lucy stew in her own juices for a while, to make sure that the girl wouldn’t go off on another tirade. She turned to face the enclosed crib. Lucy was leaning against the bars, trying her hardest to continue to plead her case. She would have a long way to go to fully realize her potential, but Lucy had at least learned where her place was. Penny had a lot in store for the girl and was eager to get started. She smiled and raised the glass, Lucy’s pleas finally reaching her ears without being filtered. The device in her hand told her everything that she needed to know. It was an insurance policy, one that others had never fully adopted.

“And now we can begin the journey to the new you! But first, who’s hungry?”

Kylie’s first real morning began with her waking up in her crib. She stretched, splaying her fingers and toes out as the familiar crinkle of her diaper greeted her. She reached for the bottle that Donna had left for her but was saddened to find that it was empty. Oh well. Empty bottle means a full diaper. Such is my life now.

Her diaper was clearly wet and she pawed at it with her mittened hands. She wasn’t wet enough to get a full sag on, but the warm dampness felt good in a way. She couldn’t explain how or why, but it did. Kylie felt content as she rolled around in her crib. The traumatizing events of the night before were still fresh in her mind, but she couldn’t be bothered to worry about it now. As Donna had explained it, messing herself was a hurdle that she had to overcome and she had rightly needed to be punished for her behavior. The bath and change back into baby Kylie was enough to teach her that such things were not indicative of the long term goals. They were moments, nothing more. She wondered what lay ahead of her. What new wonders were yet to be discovered.

She didn’t realize it but she was grinding her hips against her mittened hands, pressing down as hard as she could. She felt twinges and tingles that she had never felt before and when her eyes snapped open, she curled up into a ball, ashamed at what she had been doing. She didn’t know what it meant but something about rubbing her wet diaper against her body had felt good. Amazing even. And she wanted more, so much more, but the door swung open and Donna walked in, a fresh bottle in her hand.

“Good morning, baby!”

“Hi Donna! Looky! My bottle is all gone!”

“All gone? Where did it go?”

Kylie pointed at her belly. “In my tummy!”

“Was it good?”

“Uh huh!”

“Do you want more?”

“Yes pwease!”

Donna handed the full bottle to Kylie and she crammed it into her mouth as Donna lowered the bars to the crib. She did a quick check of Kylie’s diaper and led her to the changing table. She hadn’t expected Kylie to be wetting at night already but she figured that the bottle had something to do with it.

“My my, someone is a wet baby today!”

“I had to potty! I couldn’t hold it.”

“That’s okay, baby, that’s what your diapers are for. Let’s get you changed and then we will go downstairs for breakfast. How does oatmeal sound?”

“Sounds yummy!” Kylie crawled up on the changing table and drank her bottle while

Donna changed her. She was getting less and less embarrassed about being changed each time it happened. She still had a lot of those hesitant emotions, but Donna was kind to her and it was over quickly. Wet diapers were one thing, messy, however was a whole other thing. Donna helped her into a onesie and tickled her inner thighs as she snapped it. Kylie giggled and blushed behind her bottle.

Changed and dressed, Donna held her hand and led her downstairs. Kylie’s other hand kept the bottle in her mouth. The warm milk tasted surprisingly good. A little different from the milk that her mom made for her, but still good. She got up in the high chair and kept her hands up as Donna locked the tray in place, dropping some children’s toys on the hardened plastic. Donna set about making breakfast while Kylie played in her chair.

“So, I wanted to ask you something, Kylie. Something important.”

“Otay.”

“Can you big girl talk for me?”

"If I hafta. What's on your mind?" She stopped playing and set the bottle down. It was mostly empty.

"What kind of little do you see yourself as?"

"Little?"

"Baby."

"Oh. I don't know. I've never really thought about it. I just kind of go with what feels right."

"I see. Can I offer my evaluation?"

"Sure. You're the boss." Kylie said. Donna spun around from the stove to see a big grin on Kylie's face.

"You aren't truly a baby."

"I could have told you that!"

"No. No. That's not what I meant. What we have found is that all littles, that is, people like you, have an age range that they operate in. Some go back as far as infants, some don't. You are the latter. If I had to make a preliminary diagnosis, I would say that you are a toddler, roughly around the age of three or four."

"Preliminary diagnosis? Sounds so clinical."

"Well, I am a doctor after all."

"Yeah, but you are also a mommy. And mommies don't talk like that to littles."

"I'm not a... Nevermind. The point is, I want to alter your care around your little age."

"Okay? What does that mean?"

"Well, not much. Some things will change but not a whole lot. And no, that doesn't mean that you get to get out of your diapers."

"Who said I wanted that?" Kylie quipped.

"Huh?" Donna said, confused.

"What? I didn't say nofing."

"Uh huh. Keep it up, little girl, and it'll be nap time for you!"

"No! No naps! Not tired!" Kylie exclaimed, playfully beating on her tray with one of her toys.

"Settle down or it'll be straight back to bed, little girl."

"Otay." Kylie said, calming down. She was testing the limits and although she knew Donna wasn't serious, she still wanted to mind. She wanted to be a good girl.

"So what changes?"

"Well, for starters, I think that you are capable of feeding yourself. I will decide what you eat, but I won't feed it to you unless it cuddle time."

"Cuddle time?"

"Yes. One of the steps to help build a bond between us. It's a special time where we will sit on the couch or something and I will feed you a bottle or sippy cup and tell you how amazing you are."

"Amazing?"

"Yes. You are amazing. Anyone who is willing to reinvent themselves like you are doing is amazing."

"I'm not doing this. You are. You change me."

"Physically, yes, I change your diapers, but you are the one doing all the changing. I'm just helping. And speaking of help, do you want to help me make a cake for Lloyd and his wife?"

"Absolutely!"

"Good. Now, how do you like your oatmeal?"

"Milt, and, and brown sugar!" She messed up the pronunciation of milk, but, otherwise, her toddler talk was pretty spot on. Donna took the bowl of mushy oats over to the refrigerator and poured a little bit of her mixed milk into it. It was going to be a slow process of weaning Kylie from the store bought milk to her milk, but like others before her, Kylie wouldn't know the difference until it was too late.

She set the bowl down on Kylie's tray and handed her a baby spoon. Kylie looked at her incredulously but dug in. Donna took the bottle and refilled it, setting it in a pot of warming water. She watched as Kylie worked her way through the bowl, struggling to get any meaningful amount on her spoon. She would give Kylie a different spoon further down the line but for now, the baby needed to eat as babies do.

Donna wiped off Kylie's face when she was finished and helped her out of the high chair. She directed Kylie to the living room where she was given another bottle and some toys to play with. Donna cleaned up the kitchen while Kylie played and there was a lull in their lives. About an hour went by before Kylie walked back into the kitchen, bored.

"So..." "Yes?"

"Is this it?"

"Is this what?"

"Is this all that there is to do?" "What would you like to do?"

"I don't know. I just thought..."

"Thought what? Being a baby isn't about activities or having lots of fun. Being a baby is about existing at the moment. Not the moment that adults live in, but what's good and fun for now. To an adult, playing on the floor isn't fun. For a baby or toddler, it's the best thing ever. There is still some time before we will make the cake so I suggest that you find some way to occupy your time."

"That's what I thought. This is it. This is the routine." "I'm sorry that it doesn't meet your expectations."

"It's okay. It's just that when I was with my mom, we went out and did stuff. Shopping. Restaurants. That sort of thing."

"You aren't there yet."

"Yet?"

"Correct. All things in time, Kylie. You haven't even been here a full twenty four hours and you want more than what's in front of you. Patience. Get acclimated to the way life is here."

"How? I mean, what else is there?"

"Well, you can work on our deal we made last night."

"Messing."

"Yes."

"I...I don't have to go right now."

Donna turned from the sink and looked Kylie up and down. Her toes were pointed inward and there was a timid, weakened poise to her stance.

"I know. Your battle isn't out here." She said, taking Kylie by the hand. "Your battle is up here."

She motioned to Kylie's head. "You have to learn to let go of everything. Be the little you are inside."

"How?"

"I can't tell you that. You have to figure it out for yourself. Let's say we try a little bit of cuddle time, see if that helps put you in the right mindset."

Donna led Kylie back to the living room, scooping up the untouched bottle from the floor. She sat down on the couch, off to the far right side, and patted the spot next to her.

"Come lay in my arms and I will feed you for a little bit."

"I...I don't want to be breastfed."

Donna smirked. "Just the bottle. I promise. Everything comes in steps."

Kylie cautiously sat down and allowed herself to be pulled into Donna's lap. Donna's large breasts loomed ominously next to her face. Donna pulled Kylie close so that she could be held comfortably.

"See? Isn't this cozy?" Donna asked. "It's okay."

"I know that you are still uneasy about being this close to me but I assure you that we are only going to go as fast as you are comfortable with."

"Otay."



Kylie was secluding herself back behind her walls. She was scared and the closer she got to her boundaries, the worse she got. What little control and confidence she had when she woke up was gone. Her trembling was coming back and she could feel her sense of self slipping away.

Donna held the bottle to Kylie's lips, longing for something more intimate. Time would heal all wounds, both her's and Kylie's. Kylie's blue eyes sparkled as her lips parted, allowing the nipple to pass. She suckled from it slowly, trying to find a place where she could let it all go.

"Everything in time, Kylie, everything in its time." Donna let the bottle rest between her breasts as she rubbed Kylie's tummy. It was soothing and Kylie felt herself snuggling closer to the warm bosom of her caregiver.

"Do you know what I think? I think you need a friend. Someone who will go on this journey with you. I made some calls last night. A good friend of mine will be bringing Quackers over later tonight. What do you think about that? A little friend that you can talk to and bond with? Won't that be nice?"

Kylie nodded, sleepily. Something about belly rubs and warm milk made her super sleepy. She didn't want to nap, not yet. Donna didn't want it to happen either. She helped Kylie groggily sit up and rolled her over. She produced a pacifier and slipped it into Kylie's mouth.

"A little tummy time will be great for you." She said.

She spread Kylie's legs a little and checked her diaper.

"Not wet enough yet."

She put some toys on the couch and turned on a kids program on the tv.

"I will get some things ready to bake a cake, you lay here for a little bit." She patted Kylie's diaper and left the room, leaving the bottle within arm's reach.

Donna returned not long after to find that Kylie had left the couch. The bottle was empty and the toys were left strewn about. The tv was still on but no one was there.

"Kylie?" She called, looking around the room. Kylie wasn't there to be found. She walked around the house, checking each room. The nursery was empty, the bathroom door was locked, and Donna's room was locked.

"Kylie?" Donna called again.

"Where are you baby girl?"

Donna went from room to room, checking each corner that she thought that Kylie might have gone into.

"I'm here! I'm in my room!"

Across from the bathroom, Donna found Kylie. The young girl was crouched in a dark corner, behind the bed, crying.

"Baby? What are you doing in here?"

"I..." She said sobbing. She stood up and walked strangely around the bed. Her back was arched and her legs were apart as if something was stuck to her.

"Are you okay? What is it sweetheart?"

"I...I had to go...you know...I had to...I couldn't help it!" She exclaimed. It took a moment, but the smell finally hit her. Kylie had pooped.

"Oh, sweetie! That's okay! Everything is just fine! Let's go get you changed!"

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry!"

"Shh. You have nothing to be sorry for. This is expected. It's what is supposed to happen. There is no need to apologize."

She led Kylie up to the nursery and onto the changing table. Kylie groaned and whined, whimpering as the onesie kept everything tight to her skin. Donna set about cleaning her baby up, not dwelling on the smell or the shame the young girl had. It was not a milestone yet, but it was a start.

Cleaned and smelling much better, she pulled Kylie into a hug, burying the young girl between her breasts. Donna's skin smelled heavenly and Kylie whimpered the rest of her sobs into her soft, warm flesh.

“This is it, baby girl. This is the routine. You let it all go and use your diapers like a good girl and you are that much closer to healing. I will be here every step of the way.”

“Weawy?”

“Yes, really.”

“Can I have more cuddles?” “Absolutely. Then we make cake.”

“I love cake!”

“I love that you love cake.”

They went back downstairs to the couch and Donna just held her. Sitting side by side, Kylie’s head rested on her chest and Donna’s arm was wrapped around her. It was comforting. The big bad scary that was messing seemed not so bad, or so scary. It was a thing that she needed to do, as all people did, only she could do it wherever, whenever she felt like it. In its own way, that resembled some level of control. She wasn’t forced to do so by someone else, just like being an adult, she could choose when to let it happen. Donna had been there to take care of everything and for the few moments of discomfort that wasn’t all that uncomfortable, Kylie got to have another moment where Donna took care of her.

Her emotions were swirling. She didn’t know what to think about all of it. Her mom had forced her the first time and the second time, she had just been in the right frame of mind to let it happen. She didn’t die from it, no one ridiculed her or made fun. Her mom just cleaned her up, got her into a fresh diaper, and went about her business.

What does this all mean? Can I really be doing this? Messing myself on purpose? Because that’s what I’m supposed to do? It’s still super gross but is Donna right? Is it only gross because I was raised to think it was? Raised to believe that all of that only happens on the toilet? No one makes fun of a baby when they poop. They may comment on the smell and laugh but it’s not at the baby’s expense. And I feel good. It was super weird to go off into a room by myself and I don’t know why I crouched down, but I feel good. My tummy doesn’t hurt, my butt is clean, and here I am, being told I was a good girl. That I was supposed to do that. I like being a good girl. God knows that I didn’t hear it enough from my mother growing up. She always said that I should do better. An A in class isn’t as good as an A+. There was always room for improvement. God I’m messed up. But you know what? Donna doesn’t treat me that way. She treats me like a real person. She even thinks I’m brave for doing this, for making such a drastic change in my life. She’d make a great mother someday. To a real baby. I’m a real baby...

No. I’m a toddler. I can walk around and feed myself. I just have problems making it to the potty. Yeah, problems because the door to the bathroom is fingerprint locked shut. Bet no one else can say that they have that kind of problem. Of course, who can really say that they wear and use diapers? I can. I wouldn’t. I would never tell another living soul about any of this. Life was hard enough when I casually wet the bed. Could anyone, even Leah or Erica understand what I’m going through?

What am I going through? This is supposed to be therapy, right? There is supposed to be some great reflection of my inner self to figure out why I’m so fucked up. When does that start? Do I even want to know what’s caused all of this? Probably my mother. She’s fucked up enough other people that I could just be the next one on the list. But my brother is fine. He’s got his own family and a wife and his life is great so why am I the messed up one? I don’t know. I don’t know anything anymore. But do I need to? Not right now, I don’t think. Donna seems to have everything planned out for me. Naps, bottles, baths, and changes. That’s it. That’s the routine. Why does it sound so dull and yet, so inviting? Why do I just want to shut my brain off and be in the moment? Why does her brand of milk taste different? Why do I want to just be held by her? Why do I want to cry?

The doorbell rang as Kylie’s eyes watered. She jumped up from the couch and ran up the stairs. There was no way that she was going to let someone see her diaper clearly sticking out of the leg holes of her onesie. She may be okay with being dressed that way, but she was not okay with others seeing it.

Donna knew those trepidations well. Every little went through them. It was so early in the program for Donna to enforce social interaction so she let Kylie go. She went to the front door as the doorbell rang again, unlocked it, and pulled it open.

“Hello there, Henrietta! Do come in! How have you been?”

Kylie had just rounded the corner at the top of the stairs and froze. There was a stranger being invited into the house! She leaned slowly around the corner, keeping the bulk of her body hidden behind the wall, to peer down the stairs. Henrietta was a small black woman, dressed like she was straight out of the '70s, apron and all. She was carrying something round, a pie, Kylie presumed, and looked as friendly as she sounded.

“Oh, you know me. I’m still kicking around. Thought I’d bring by this here pie for ya. Lloyd said that you were back from your business trip.”

“Oh, yes. Indeed. I just got in yesterday afternoon. It was only a weekend away. Nothing major. Tell Lloyd that he did a fantastic job on the shrubs, the whole front of the house looks great!”

“I will, Ma’am, I will. He does what he can to keep everything going for you folks.” “And we appreciate all that you do. Come into the kitchen, I’ll make us some tea.” “That’s mighty kind of you. I’d like some tea.”

They moved from the entryway into the kitchen and Kylie was left standing at the top of the stairs, unsure of what to do. She was curious about this woman and about Donna’s interactions with others. She slowly crept down the stairs to eavesdrop on their conversation.

“-and I see that Miss Penny is back home too. I thought she would have been home when you were. That pretty young thing is always getting herself into something or other.”

“From what I’ve heard, Penny has a knack for tough nuts to crack. It keeps her busy, for sure.”

“She’s a fighter, no doubt about it. My Aunt Delores was a fighter. The toughest woman you’d ever meet. She didn’t take no lip from no one.”

“Kind of like you, Henrietta?”

“Just like me! What have I been telling you all these years? A man’s gotta treat you like a queen or he ain’t worth it.”

“Well, as you can see, there is no man here treating me like I’m anything.”

“That’s ‘cause you are too busy with your work. A single career focused woman isn’t a bad thing, but you’re gonna miss out on your chance for a family if you keep this up.”

“My work is my life. My work needs me.”

“No doubt about that. You’re doing God’s work. Helping folk like you do. How’s the newest one? Lloyd said she was quite the cutie pie.”

“She’s shy. But I think she will turn out just fine.”

“Shy, huh? Well, who can blame them, going through what they go through, poor things. I hope she likes pumpkin pie.”

“What do you say, Kylie? Do you like pumpkin pie?” Donna said, a little louder so her voice would carry into the hall. Kylie had snuck all the way down the stairs and was slowly peeking around the corner. Donna had caught a glimpse of her and outed her presence to Henrietta.

The older woman turned around in her chair to look but Kylie was too scared to come into view. She was shaking in fear but frozen in place. To her right, the stairs and anonymity, to the left, the kitchen and exposure. The trembling got worse as Donna rounded the corner and crouched in front of her.

“Would you like to meet Henrietta?” Donna asked, and followed up with a whisper, “I won’t force you to, but she’s really nice and knows what I do.”

Kylie tried to turn her head from side to side but was unable. She clenched onto Donna’s arm, waves of anxiety crashing over her. Donna stood and pulled Kylie close, Kylie buried her face into Donna’s body as they walked around the corner and into view. Kylie was shaking so bad that the mere touch of the linoleum floor on her bare feet made her bladder give out and she wet herself in a rushed torrent.

“There, there, Kylie, it’s okay. Henrietta is such a nice lady, you’re simply going to love her! Come on now, say hi.”

Kylie managed to wave her hand slightly in front of her as a gesture of hello and was shocked when a pair of soft hands grabbed it and held it firm. Something was pressed into her hand, something round and hard, but thin and flimsy. She turned her face towards her hands to get a glimpse of it.

Henrietta was smiling, sipping on her tea. She had deposited the universal sign of acceptance into Kylie’s hand. A sucker. A grape, bubblicious sucker at that. Kylie loved grape.

“What do we say?” Donna asked.

“Fank you.” Kylie muttered.

“A little louder please, Kylie, so that we can understand you.”

“Fank you.” Kylie said, louder this time.

“You are very welcome, Kylie. My name is Henrietta and it is a pleasure to meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too.”

“Would you like me to unwrap that for you?”

Unsure of what to do but wanting to be polite, Kylie handed the sucker back and nodded.

Henrietta unwrapped it and handed it back, holding the stick with two fingers. Kylie took it and promptly popped it into her mouth. Like her pacifier, it soothed her emotions and helped her calm down.

“Let’s get you up in your high chair and when you are done with your sucker, you can have some pie.”

Kylie flushed red with embarrassment as Donna pulled away from her and her diaper and onesie could be seen. Henrietta said nothing about it but watched as Kylie got up in the high chair. Donna clicked the tray into place and went back to her conversation.

They talked about all sorts of topics, none of them being Kylie or her condition. It was as if Kylie didn’t exist or wasn’t important to Henrietta. Donna was on point though, delivering a small slice of pumpkin pie with whipped cream on top and a sippy cup of water to Kylie’s tray when the sucker was gone. It was a great change of pace for Kylie to be around adults and not feel self conscious.

Time went by and Kylie lost track of the amount of things they talked about but near the end, as the afternoon sun was starting to fall behind the trees, Henrietta finally stood up.

“Well, these old bones and I have to get on home. I have a roast in the oven and Lloyd likes his dinner on time.”

“Yes. I’m sure I have a little girl that needs a change and dinner to put on myself. Let me get my checkbook.”

“It’s of no matter. We can catch up later.”

“Nonsense. You two do such great work that I don’t want to feel like I’m taking advantage.” Donna went to grab her purse from the bedroom, leaving Henrietta alone with Kylie.

“That’s a great woman you have taking care of you. She’ll do good by you. She always does.”

“Uhhh, thanks.”

“And don’t you pay no mind. Your secret is safe. Your business is your business. And it appears as if you are setting in quite nicely, unlike that brat that Penny has.”

Donna reappeared with her checkbook in hand, talking to herself about the state of her purse. She set back down at the table and filled out the archaic payment method.

“Was it five hundred this month, Henrietta?”

“I do believe so.”

“Six hundred it is, then. You can’t argue, check is written and signed.” Donna said, tearing the page from the book. She handed it to Henrietta who, for the first time in Kylie’s experience, looked to be on the defensive.

“You are too kind, Ma’am. Far too kind.”

“It’s Donna, Henrietta, you can just call me Donna. And I take care of those that I care about.”

“Bless your sweetheart. I must be going though. Can’t be wandering these mean streets in the dark.”

A joke between them, as the gated community had zero crime. Henrietta was from the boroughs of New York City and had to grow up quickly. Donna was from the upper class segment of Chicago and knew little but the pampered life of the city’s elite. Different worlds made them great friends.

Donna and Henrietta hugged goodbye and Donna led her out the door. The old lady waved goodbye at Kylie who reciprocated the gesture and then she was gone. Donna pulled off the tray and helped Kylie to her feet, leading her upstairs for a change.

Laying on the table and staring at the ceiling, Kylie was full of questions. Mostly about her own fears and concerns, but one that was nagging her.

“Donna?”

“Yes, baby?”

“Does Penny live nearby?”

“Yes. Just down the road in fact. A few streets over.” “Does she work with you?”

“She does.”

“Does she do what you do?”

“Yes. What’s with all the questions?”

“Something Henrietta said. Penny has someone at her house like me. I was just curious as to who.”

“I don’t know, to be quite honest. We don’t talk much to each other at the start. It’s not until our littles are ready for socialization that we get together.”

“Will that happen?”

“Of course. But in time. She always has littles who are difficult to get into the routine so it takes longer. Why are you so interested?”

“I don’t know. Maybe if I knew that I wasn’t so alone in all of this, things would be better.”

“Isolation is one of the many problems this program has. Littles need social development. It helps them grow as littles to be around others that are going through the same things.”

“Yeah...”

“So, what you're telling me, is that you want a friend?”

“...yeah...”

Donna smiled and finished taping up Kylie’s diaper. “I think that’s terrific! And I will reach out to Penny to see how she’s doing with her little.”

“Thanks, mo- I mean, Donna.”

“You’re very welcome, baby, no let’s go make a cake!”