

From Party Pooper to Diaper Pooper

August 2022 – Commission

Chapter Two

Wow, last night was crazy scary!

I'm still mulling it over a day later, of course. It's Saturday now, and much as I'd love to have stayed in bed and slept off that nagging headache from last night, I've got a job to do. Got those Freiburg kids to take care of this afternoon, while their parents are off to the doctor's. It wouldn't be very nice or responsible of Babysitter Jennifer to have shown up late, would it? Or stood them up entirely?

Of course not. But as sweet and cute as the little angels are, I can't quite stop mulling over the shocking events at last night's party. I may be playing peekaboo with them and changing diapers and reading them storybooks, sure – but in the back of my head it's all still there, just like it was in those disturbing dreams that have chased me all night. The sound of that irate neighbor's angry yells. The cold gleam of light on that awful gun he'd been holding. The sight of poor Michael, struggling up from the floor, his hand over his hurt and probably bloodied nose-

Ugh, it's so scary! And you know, I get it. I know I'm kinda chicken. That's why I talked my parents into letting me do pharmacology instead of medicine, after all. Way too much blood and bones and stuff involved in being a doctor. So, yeah – when our nice cozy party gets interrupted by that madman, just when you think everyone's going to be safe and happy...

Well, it's just super scary, isn't it? Like, this is our *home!* And if that's not safe, then what is?

Huh. Looks like Cynthia just texted in the group chat. "Meeting in common room tonight. We all seriously need to talk. Be there by 7 or else!"

It's got to be about what happened last night. Definitely. Let's see... the Freiburgs should be back by 6. That should give me enough time to pick up some groceries on the way back. Oh, and maybe a special treat for Michael. Though maybe it's a bit weird, since we're just friends? But I just feel so bad about him getting hurt last night... Hmm, maybe I should bring some for everyone instead? Maybe some cookies? But what if someone doesn't like them-

No, Jessica, I tell myself, with a toss of my pink tinged, blonde locks. You're obsessing again. Just breathe. Focus on the little ones here and on doing your job. It'll be fine. And as far as what's going to

happen tonight... well, speculating about it in advance won't change anything, will it?

"That guy was fucking insane, right? Like, what the hell? You know, the more I think about it the more I really think we need-"

The chatter is already lively by the time I make it there: a box of discount pastries in one hand and my groceries in the other. "Hey, folks," I manage, before slipping off to the kitchen and tucking my yogurt and fruit into the fridge for safekeeping. And then I'm back out: surveying the room, spotting the now-empty table by the wall, ducking apologetically over and depositing the pastries there for folks to enjoy...

"We have to do something to deal with that guy," Cynthia is declaring loudly, apparently continuing her diatribe. "He *literally* threatened one of us with a *gun* – and I'm sure he'll do it again if we don't do anything. Besides – he actually hurt Michael!" She pauses, almost as if she's suddenly recollected Michael's existence, and scans the room for him. "How are you feeling by now, dude? You looked pretty bad last night..." I catch sight of Michael over in the corner, blushing and waving away our attention. "Um, no, it's- it's fine. Sarah and Brian checked it out last night, and it doesn't really hurt anymore-"

Thank goodness for that! "But let's face it: whether he was seriously hurt or not doesn't matter," Sarah maintains, and I find myself nodding in agreement. "The thing is, this guy needs to be stopped. But to be honest, I really don't see how. The police around here are useless – believe me, I know. They did fucking *nothing* when my flat got robbed two years ago, remember? Tell them, and I promise you absolutely nothing will happen..."

The thought of this guy getting off scot-free is too much to bear. Maybe I'm just an idealistic idiot, but I can't stand the thought that bullies and jerks can just go around doing whatever they want to other people and get away with it. "But it's simply not right to waltz up to someone's door and assault them!" I blurt out before I quite know what I'm saying. "And certainly not just because you don't like their music!"

The image of a bratty kid I used to babysit flashes before my eyes, and on I plunge, following the thread of sudden inspiration without thinking it through. "Honestly, that guy reminded me of this kid I used to babysit who would throw the *worst* tantrums you've ever seen, and over the smallest little things." I chuckle nervously, suddenly aware that everyone's listening attentively to my words. "I mean... this guys sounded just like that spoiled brat, honestly. A big overgrown baby who just

didn't get his way..."

"Yeah, a big crybaby – with a *gun!*" Cassandra is snickering, and now the others are joining in a chorus of sarcastic and wry laughter. "If only he was young enough to spank, huh? 'No more bang-bang toy for you, honey! Now quit your crying and suck on your dummy. Let Mommy strap you in your stroller and take you for walksies...'"

Sarah's laughing loudly now, shaking her head and shrugging. "As if! Honestly, I bet the reason he acts that way is because nobody ever taught him to be a decent person when he *was* little. Guess it's too late now, though..."

Or is it?

The thoughts that are suddenly filling my head at Cassandra's words may be wrong: *very* wrong and *very* weird. Maybe they're the product of my own fear and the awful dreams I was having all night. But I can't seem to shrug them away. In them, that awful man is wailing like a baby... we're stuffing a giant dummy into his mouth... strapping him down into an oversized stroller... smacking his hands and chiding him every time he tries to hit us...

"Is it really too late?" I ask – again before quite knowing what I'm saying. "Like, I don't know. He was definitely nasty, yeah. But surely if you can train a little kid to play nice and not be mean to others, you'd think the same thing would work with a grownup..." Sarah's eyeing me skeptically. "So, like, what are you suggesting, Jess? Like we just rock up to his place and tell him not to be mean? Or what? Or we'll call his *mom?*"

"No, no," I hastily amend, blushing a bit amid the general laughter. "I'm sorry. I'm not really suggesting anything. I was just... thinking aloud. You know, if we can't get help from the police, and we can't ignore him and let him hurt us again... I mean, we have to do something! Right?"

"Do *what*, girl?" Cynthia's cocking her head speculatively. "Come on, out with it!" "No, I was just being silly," I shrug self-consciously. "It's stupid, I know. I was just thinking how you could treat the guy like a baby. Like you said, you know. Kinda... re-raise him."

"Regress him," Cassandra breathes, and now I see a sly look of admiration and dangerous curiosity in her eyes. "Make him a giant, pathetic baby. Punish him and train him not to be mean to others... Oh, god, wouldn't that be fucking *rich?!*"

"Guys, *c'mon*," Brian cuts in from his post beside the table, his mouth half-full of pastry. "We need serious solutions here, okay?" "Oh, but this *is* serious," Cynthia retorts, and now I'm feeling apprehensive. "This guy lives close by, right? And we've got an entire house here? Surely nobody would mind if we invited him over and kept him here with us for awhile, right? Just for... you know. Training?"

"Oh, fuck," Sarah mutters, and now I can see growing enthusiasm in her face. "Wait, you mean, like, *kidnap* him?" "Of course kidnap him," Cynthia responds, then gestures over at me. "And Jess, your idea is brilliant! If he acts like a spoiled brat, we'll do society a service and treat him like one! Listen: he literally *assaulted* us and *threatened* us with a gun. I'm more than sure that a bit of corrective training in self-defense is entirely well-deserved, don't you think?"

"Training... like, how?" I ask, hardly wanting to know the answer. This ball I seem to have started is fast getting out of my hands, and I'm not quite sure I like it. "Girl, you tell us!" Cassandra giggles, tossing her hair emphatically. "What's the age you start teaching kids not to hit people?" "Uhh..." I stall for a bit of time. "Maybe a year old? Two at the most?"

"There you have it!" Cassandra nods. "We bring him to stay with us, and we start him over: at one year old. What kinda stuff do you need for a one-year-old kid, Jess?" "Umm... Well, bottles and bibs, for starters," I begin self-consciously, half amused and half horrified at what we're saying. "A crib and stroller and nice warm onesies. Pacifiers and teething toys. Oh, and diapers, of course – one year is way too early for potty-training..."

The others are chortling now, and Cynthia is gleefully nodding away. "Okay – great idea, Jess! I don't suppose they make cribs and diapers and shit big enough, but we can sure fucking give it a try, can't we? It's all for a good cause, after all. We won't hurt him – seriously. We'll teach him his place, and we'll keep everyone safe... including the neighbors. What's not to love?"

What's not to love? I... I don't even know. Part of me is thrilled to hear this extraordinary idea taking shape, while another part of me – the kind and sensitive Jessica that hates to see anyone hurt – is shivering in disgust and anxiety at what's being discussed. And yet... goodness, I can't stand the thought of that guy going scot-free and hurting anyone else. Not on our watch.

And so, I gulp. And nod. And smile. "Yeah!" I cheer nervously. "We'll... show him!"

Because we have to. Because frankly, I can't think of any other way to keep him from hurting anyone else.