

The Crib

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1. The Plan

"But why do I have to give up my room for that and sleep on the couch?" I ask despondently. In itself I understand why Marco will be staying here for a few nights while his mother is in hospital for a planned operation, because his father cannot combine his work and the care for the other children with the attention a retard needs. (Yes, I know I'm not supposed to call him that, but terms like autistic and Down's Syndrome are just fancy words for the same crap, aren't they?) But then let my parents make their own bed available - after all, they offered it, not me! But no, the couch can't accommodate 2 people, and they explain to me again why he can't sleep on the couch:

"Josie, you do know that for Marco this will be a very difficult period, and that he will probably try to run away to go back to his familiar surroundings, and if that doesn't work he will show other undesirable behavior? That is why we have arranged for a big crib, and the only place it can be put is in your room. Your bed is getting too small now anyway, so we'll get rid of it, and you'll get an adult-sized bed after Marco is gone." Well that would be about time. I was finally starting to grow a bit more, but I'm still no taller than Marco, for example, although he is 2 years younger. Maybe it will be worth it to sleep on the couch for a few nights, if it means I can finally replace my childish bed. Perhaps something romantic with a nice wooden headboard?

"Then can I pick one out myself?"

"We'll see about that after Marco leaves again." Well, at least that wasn't a no. I know my parents don't have much money, but a good bed is important to them too, I hope.

"Josie, there's one more thing. We're not confident that we'll get everything right with Marco in one go, because we don't have any experience with caring for him full-time. Of course, we can't have him managing to get away, because that could be life-threatening for him. But we also want to make it as

comfortable as possible for him. That's why we'd like to practice some things in advance, and we were hoping you'd be willing to play the role of Marco in that." Oh, that's clever of them. Taking advantage of my interest in acting by calling it a role. But I'm going to sell my skin dearly, if at all.

"And what will I get in return?"

"If you manage to escape or get your diaper off, you'll get that new smartphone for your birthday." Oh, that sounds interesting! Kind of surprising, since my parents are already complaining that I spend way too much time on my phone. But a diaper? I thought I'd pretty much gotten rid of that - even the diaper panties have no longer been necessary at night for the past few years, except when I'm sleeping somewhere else - somehow the unknown causes me to occasionally still lose urine at night.

"OK, maybe I want to try then, as long as no one has to see me, or hear about it. But for how long should it be, and will I need to use the diapers as well?"

"We want to test everything that happens in a day, so the test lasts for 24 hours. That will give you ample time to earn your phone. As for the diapers; as far as we know, Marco's bowel movements are regular, and we can schedule that with a diaper change. That should work for you too, we expect. But since Marco still sometimes wants to take his diaper off, or put his hands in it, if he doesn't get his way, you won't be able to take your diaper off yourself either, and we also need to practice checking if the diaper is wet, and changing it, so the pee goes in the diaper."

After discussing some more details, I decide to accept the challenge. That new smartphone I have my eye on is just too tempting. Marco will arrive on a Tuesday, and I will take his role on the Sunday before.

2. The Challenge Begins

The Friday before Marco arrives, the crib that my parents picked up somewhere second-hand arrives, along with several other boxes that I'm not quite sure about what's inside, and that my parents confiscate before I have a chance to satisfy my curiosity.

Saturday during the day, while I'm at drama club, it is installed in my room. When I return from rehearsal, Uncle Anton, Marco's father, is also there, so he apparently helped out. I am not allowed in my room yet, so it is going to be a surprise.

That evening after dinner it will start for me. I'm not looking forward to it, especially the diapers, but I try not to think about that too much, and concentrate on my role, and the smartphone I'm going to earn. At least I will be well taken care of, have no chores like doing the dishes, and will be allowed to misbehave - maybe I will enjoy myself. We only agreed that I won't use force against my parents - Marco never does either.

During dinner I'm still quite tense about it, and I struggle to get some food in. Then the three of us go to my room, which has been quite revamped in the meantime. But before I can take in all the differences, my father says, while checking the time, "Josie, the test starts now. So until tomorrow, 18:50, you will be treated like Marco."

Expecting that they won't be so alert right away, I try to dash away immediately; if I can touch the front door I will earned my phone straight away. But my father has closed my door, preventing me

from running through, and before I can open it I'm grabbed by the waist, "Oh no, young lady, we would like very much to keep enjoying your presence!" And without effort I am lifted up and deposited on the work table that is normally in the shed. Dad's yoga mat is now lying on it. I have to lie down on it; it's not long enough that I fit on it completely, and my lower legs hang down over the edge. Then a strap, apparently attached to the sides of the table, is buckled over my belly, "so our little girl doesn't fall off and get hurt". Obviously, it has nothing to do with preventing me from getting away quickly or from getting a diaper on, I think sarcastically. I make an attempt to see if I can get the belt open, but then my hands are grabbed and secured in loops above my head. I can't see them, but they feel like scarves or something. My parents seem to have given this a lot of thought, and for now I don't see any way to give them a hard time. Quickly my pants are off and my mother puts a diaper on me, while my father stands at a distance, ready to come to the rescue if needed, but until then tries to give me some privacy.

It appears that my mother is reverting to how she used to put a diaper on me, with comments like "Can my big girl make a nice little bridge," and "Here comes the first adhesive strip, choo-choo choo-choo, and latched on." I'm already starting to complain about the childish treatment, "Mooommm," but then involuntarily have to laugh about it, and decide to let her have her fun. Despite the fact that I am tied up it is an intimate moment, and I can enjoy the love with which she does it.

Over the diaper I get a pair of plastic pants, and then I am untied from the table and put on my legs again. Now my father joins us again, and one of them keeps hold of me all the time. My T-shirt and bra are taken off, and another, unfamiliar T-shirt is put on. This one is a lot longer, and appears to close between my legs with buttons: it is a romper. "Uncle Anton has already brought some of Marco's things today," I get as an explanation. "So, and now your pajamas."

"But it's still quite early!"

"You don't have to go to bed yet; we're just going to watch TV in our pajamas. Then you won't have to change again later on." I shrug; I'm not expecting normal daytime clothing either, so it probably won't matter much if I'm already walking around in pajamas. So I step into the trouser legs held up for me; judging by the amount of fabric, it looks like a one-piece sleepsuit to me. I already have one or two onesies, but they're more for winter. This one feels a little thinner. When my legs are in, my bare feet don't touch the floor: the suit appears to have attached feet. When it is pulled up further, it turns out that the closure is not in front but behind, and so I have to put my arms in towards the front. My hands do not come out of the sleeves either, but end up in a kind of mittens, where even the thumbs are in the same compartment. I don't really understand what that's good for, but then again, it's just a day of testing, so I let it all happen. The zipper on my back is pulled up, and then there is some more fumbling and I hear a click, like of a snap buckle. Of course I can't see what they've done, so I try to feel what it is with my hand. But I can't reach it easily, and soon notice that feeling with the mittens doesn't work very well.

I don't get much time anyway, because they are already ready with the next thing. A bundle of black bands attached blue piece that seems to be made of water-repellent material. I have to put my arms through it, and the blue piece comes to sit in front of my chest, with straps under my armpits, around my chest, and across my shoulders, that are secured in my back. There appears to be a leash on it, which my parents can use to keep me from running off; although it doesn't really look like a child's harness, it works the same way. As an explanation I get, "This is Marco's old Crelling harness. This one is a little small for him by now, so they bought a bigger size, allowing us to practice with this one in the meantime. Fortunately, you are a bit narrower, and it still fits you just fine." Yippee.

Apparently they are now satisfied with how I am bundled up, and I am allowed to walk downstairs in front of them. I quickly grab my cell phone, careful not to drop it because of the mittens, which clearly provide less grip. The feet of the sleeping suit do not give much grip on the floor either, and my mother, who is holding the leash of the harness, forces me to go down the stairs very slowly and carefully. I also feel too insecure to try to pull myself loose and reach the front door, but when I get to the bottom of the stairs that changes. Unfortunately, my mother has a firm grip on the leash, and when the leash is tight I am abruptly stopped, my feet start slipping, and I almost fall backwards. The large PVC piece on my chest does prevent the pulling from being too uncomfortable, but my mother is a lot bigger and heavier than me, and I can't pull free. Trying to see if I can get the harness off seems more convenient when my parents are not directly behind me, and will immediately see if I try anything, so that will have to wait.

Normally I crawl into my chair, but this time I'm directed to the middle of the couch, and there my father pulls out a piece of chain from behind the cushions, which he connects to my harness. It sounds like with a padlock. I try out how much room it leaves me; I can sit anywhere on the couch, and get up, but can only move away from the couch a few steps. "Sorry, a chain and lock is not a very friendly solution, but we have to improvise a bit, and Uncle Anton assured us that it doesn't seem to matter to Marco. He will try to get away, but if he finds he has no chance he will calm down quickly, and he seems comfortable otherwise." For me, of course, it's rather weird to be restricted in my freedom like this, but it feels different, because this is just a test and a challenge. I'm sure it would feel totally different if this was seriously meant to limit my freedom. Now it's actually more of a game, and like Marco I first try to get away by pulling on the chain, trying to wriggle out of the harness, etc., but nothing works. Sulking, I finally sit down on the couch, where my parents come and sit next to me on either side.

First we watch the 8 o'clock news, but that interests me only slightly, so I grab my phone. Already when trying to unlock it, things go wrong: the mittens prevent me from scanning my fingerprint, and even swiping doesn't work. "Mom, I can't check my messages like this!" I complain. "Yes dear, I can see. I think that might be good for you, so put it away, and enjoy an evening of peace and quiet." Rest? It just makes me restless not being able to look at the incoming messages, and my friends must be surprised that there are no replies. It's a good thing this is only 1 evening; otherwise I would go crazy.

After the news, we watch the movie *Up*, which is actually quite entertaining. My parents almost seem to be having a contest who makes me feel most comfortable; my mom comes with a glass of soda with a straw, my dad grabs a bag of chips. "I just grabbed a straw; otherwise with your hands wrapped up it might be a bit challenging not to spill," my mother explains, and my father feeds me the chips to keep my mittens from getting dirty. Huddled up close to them, and being stroked every now and then, I feel like a child again, relaxing and enjoying each others company without worrying about whether such a thing is appropriate for a teenager, and frustration at all the restrictions they still place on me every day despite the fact that I am already a young adult - after all, I play a role, so I am allowed to behave different than normal.

Nice and warm, pampered, and with an enjoyable movie, I've completely forgotten that I'm in a diaper and in a child's sleep suit that makes my hands much less useful, with a harness over it which is chained to the couch. Actually I should be doing my best to escape, but right now I feel too relaxed and sleepy to make an effort to do so.

As soon as the movie is over I have to go to bed, and protests that it is still early are ignored. When I let them know that my diaper is still dry, a quick washcloth is run over my face, I have to brush my teeth, and then I get into bed. That cage bed does look rather fearsome. It is an actual adult size, so probably 2 meters long, and also a lot wider than my old bed, maybe 1 meter. But the most striking thing is of course the wooden fence that surrounds it on all sides. It goes up a long way, and I would have to jump to be able to touch the top from the floor. Climbing out therefore doesn't seem to be an option. On the side is a door, through which I am requested to crawl. When it is closed behind me, I hear the click of a lock engaging. On the bed are my familiar pillow and duvet, and my mother has apparently also brought out some of my stuffed animals and positioned them in the corners. At first I want to make a nasty comment about it, that my mother still sees me as a child, but actually I feel uncomfortable, locked in a cage like a wild animal, and could use their company. It may be just a test, but at the end of the day I am really locked up until tomorrow morning, and that gives me a chill. My parents watch with concern to see how I react, and when they see that I'm pretty uncomfortable, my dad rolls my desk chair next to the bed, grabs my hand through the bars, and says he'll stay with me as long as I'm not comfortable. I'm a little embarrassed that that comment causes my eyes to moisten, and strangely, I feel more connected to my parents than I have in years.

"Josie, we've put a baby monitor here next to your bed - if there's anything you can always call us." Normally, of course, I would have found that a gross invasion of my privacy, but now it's really just reassuring. And what use is privacy to me anyway if I can't do anything?

In the end, it doesn't take me that long to get used to my situation, and although it's nice to have my dad keep me company, it's also about time I started earning my new phone, and if I want to try something I obviously can't have him around. So I pretend I'm gradually falling asleep, give my dad a smile and say, "Dad, thank you. I'm fine now. Good night," turning me onto my other side and closing my eyes. Gently he says goodnight too, rolls the chair back and leaves the room.

I wait a few more minutes to make sure they're not coming back, and then I cautiously start exploring - I have to be quiet, because if they hear me through the baby monitor they'll probably come and stop me before I can escape. As I thought, the sides are clearly too high to attempt to climb over, especially with the slippery mittens and feet of my sleep suit. The little door in the side is also pretty solidly constructed, and after some pushing and pulling, it's clear to me that brute force is not going to achieve anything there. I don't see anything like a lever or the like to open it, and when I feel around on the outside next to the doorposts I do come across something of a circular protrusion, but I can't quite feel what it is, and there doesn't seem to be anything I can push or pull against. So for now, I don't see any possibilities of leaving the bed on my own.

I turn my attention to the other part of the challenge: taking off the diaper. To do this, of course, I must first take off the sleep suit, otherwise I'll never get to it. With the few dresses I have that have a zipper at the back, I can eventually get them on and off myself, although it's a lot easier if Mom does it. Of course, it's even more challenging with covered hands, and a one-piece suit like this can't be pulled up and down as much as a dress, especially since the diaper keeps the crotch extra low. I finally do get some movement in the zipper, and can slide it down a bit. But then it won't go any further, and there seems to be something of a barrier over the zipper, about 5cm below the top. That, of course, must be that buckle I heard clicking. But I can only just touch it, and can't quite figure out how it's supposed to open. According to the sound it made when it closed, it could be one of those side-release buckles that you have to push on both sides at the same time. In this case I would have to push with one arm from above and simultaneously with the other from below, but I

can't do that at all. Damn, this is a lot harder than I thought! My arms are quite fatigued and I haven't accomplished anything yet.

I can think of one more thing to try: if I can get my arms in, maybe I can get the diaper off, even though it will still be inside the sleeper. That should count as an escape too, right? So I make an attempt to pull at one mitten with the other arm, and at the same time pull that elbow through the armpit of the suit. But it's not stretchy, and too tight at the top and around my arms, and I have to give up on that too.

Tired and disappointed, I let myself fall on my back. My arm touches one of the cuddly toys that my mother had put in the bed, my bear 'Mister Paddie', and on impulse I grab him, for which I seem to need both hands. I hold him in front of me to take a look - after all, he's been in the back of my closet for years. Suddenly the smell is so familiar that I am glad he's there, and I press him against me. I notice that I'm actually feeling pretty good; the pajamas are very soft and comfortably warm, I have my old familiar cuddly toy again, and the strangest thing is that although the cage bed keeps me in, it also seems to keep the rest of the world at bay. It is as if I am in a cocoon in which I am secure and safe. The bear brings back fond memories of the past, and before I know it I have fallen asleep.

3. The Morning of the Challenge

When I wake up, there is already plenty of daylight coming through the curtains. Gradually I realize again what is going on: why my hands are covered, why there is a thick diaper package between my legs, and why I am holding my old teddy bear. Quickly I put the bear back in the corner where my mother had put it - imagine if they saw that I had slept all night with Mr. Paddie in my arms! And that diaper pack seems a lot thicker than it was last night. I didn't wake up at all during the night, so I must have filled it without realizing. I'm kind of worried about that, because I had that under control, but I reassure myself that these are rather unusual circumstances, despite being in my own room, and that I would have needed to fill the diaper even if I had woken up. I yawn and stretch a good bit. Such a big bed is a luxury; how nice it will be when I can choose something like that for myself. Usually it is challenging to really wake up in the morning, especially when I have to get up early to go to school, but now I feel fully refreshed and curious what the day will bring.

Now that I am wide awake, and full of energy, I decide to make another attempt to escape. It can't be that difficult to open the zipper of my onesie so that I can put it down, can it? But just like last night, I manage to touch the buckle with 1 hand at a time, but not to push on both sides at the same time. Then when my bedroom door opens, I quickly pull my hands back. Despite the fact that we agreed beforehand that I will try to escape, I still feel caught. To disguise that, I cheerfully say "Good morning." They both come in again - apparently quite wary about my escape skills.

"Hi honey, did you sleep well?"

"Yes, actually."

"Good to hear. And was it nice with Mr. Paddie?"

Oops, they know anyway! I turn bright red and stutter, "how ...?"

"When we went to bed we checked inside to see if everything was going well. You looked so cute I could have eaten you."

Leave it to my mother to make it weird again. My father quickly changes the subject, "Did you wake up during the night? And did you have trouble figuring out what was going on then? Have you tried calling us over the baby monitor?"

"No, actually I slept through in one stretch, and when I just woke up I knew pretty quickly what and why."

"And were you able to keep the diaper dry?" Again, my mother knows how to get me uncomfortable flawlessly.

"No, it's wet." There's no point not to be honest about it; after I've already said I didn't wake up during the night, so I add softly, "I didn't notice."

"Oh, honey, that's too bad. But of course it's all so unusual that we're not surprised either. When everything is back to normal I'm sure it will all go away soon."

"Yes, I expect so." Trying to remain a little optimistic about it. "What time is it? I'm hungry." Normally I look at my phone for the time, but I can't do that now. In fact, I think I even forgot to take it upstairs with me last night. I must really have been half asleep already, because normally I don't lose track of it for a second.

"It's ten past eight. Pretty early for you, on a Sunday. And you're already so awake!"

Yes, I had little to say to that - often enough I don't feel awake until lunchtime. But then again, before I go to sleep it's usually a lot later. My parents' rule of no computer or mobile phone use after 21:30 and no TV after 22:00 has not been enforced for the longest time; they don't keep to it themselves either. And when I go to bed I always have to check if there are any new messages, and then it is often difficult to put it away again; just follow that link, watch that clip, and before I know it, a few hours have passed. Last night I couldn't do that, so I fell asleep much earlier than usual. But of course I'm not going to tell my parents about this. So I make up some generic answer, "Yes, the bed sleeps well. Lots of space."

"Come, let's get you ready for the day, and then we'll have a nice Sunday breakfast." That appeals to me, although to my surprise I also feel some resistance for a moment to give up my safe surroundings and my comfortable sleeping suit. But that's nonsense, of course, and I impatiently get down on my knees by the little door. My father takes a thing of metal out of his pocket; some kind of oversized key that reminds me of what they use to open those public trash cans. He puts it in the protrusion I felt last night, gives it a twist, and the door opens.

With the room door closed again and both parents in the way, it's pointless trying to run off once more, and so I meekly let them take off my pajamas; first the buckle and then the zipper. It's still a little chilly, but the romper I have on underneath prevents it from suddenly feeling too cold on my back. When my hands come out of the sleeves, it does feel really nice - the mittens, while not very thick, and still allowing to grab things with them, limit what I can do quite a bit anyway, especially my cell phone, of course. The feet on the sleep suit were actually quite comfortable, and I didn't have cold feet in bed at all. Once the suit is completely off, my mom quickly puts my feet in my bunny slippers. Those are actually mainly for the winter, but now they're also nice. Over the bodysuit comes a cardigan.

I don't really understand what they are doing - shouldn't my diaper come off first? But I am lifted onto the improvised changing table and secured again. They're not taking any chances; I'll really have to earn my new phone. As my mother begins to fiddle around my crotch, I remember again

that the romper has buttons there, and that she can just change the diaper while my upper body and feet stay nice and warm.

“Well, you produced quite a bit last night!” Thanks Ma, just rub it in. Once the diaper is off, and the area given a quick wipe, to my surprise I am released and put back on my feet. Then I am taken to the bathroom, where I am put on the toilet. I have to sit well back, and then they take out a belt attached to the back of the pot, and it is buckled around my waist. Then my mother produces another padlock, which she puts through a hole in the belt and the buckle, and then clicks shut.

“Dearie, now go and do your number two like a big girl, so you don't have to do it in your diaper.”

“Moommmm”

“Sorry, Josie, I got carried away for a moment. But please try; it's going to be a lot more hassle if you have to go later.”

Dad adds, “One of Marco's possible annoying behaviors that we have to take into account is that he might start putting his hands in the poop. Hence, we need to make sure he can't get up from the toilet by himself.”

Then my parents leave the bathroom, and I am left behind, safely buckled on the potty. At least, that's how my mother apparently sees it. Luckily I get some privacy to defecate, anyway. The strap is tight around my waist, preventing me from rising more than a few inches. The lock proves effective, and I can't get the belt open either. I think back to the moment when my mother clicked it shut. For a moment that sent a shiver down my spine, and I felt my heart beat faster. Last night I was probably chained to the couch with a padlock too, but then everything was so new and uncomfortable, and it happened behind my back. Now that it happened right under my nose, it apparently made more of an impression. It feels exciting, which I attribute to the challenge, and I try to pull on it again. But that doesn't help me at all, of course, so I go ahead and concentrate on actually using the toilet; after all, I don't want to run the risk of soiling my diaper later. Pushing too hard doesn't seem to be a good thing, but luckily after a little help it soon starts.

When it's done I try to wipe myself down, but the belt holds me too close to the toilet bowl, and I can't reach it very well. Eventually I have no choice but to call my parents to tell them I'm done. When they come back in I explain that I'm done, but that the area is still dirty.

“Yes honey, we're going to take care of that now. Just do a basic wiping yourself, then we'll go ahead and clean the area thoroughly before the new diaper goes on.” She opens the lock again, and makes me stand up and wipe. Back on the changing table, everything is thoroughly cleaned with a washcloth, followed by talcum powder. “For diapers only at night, it's not necessary, but if you now have a diaper on during the day as well, we'd better make sure you don't get a diaper rash. Do you remember having that once before? That was almost as bad as when your first teeth came through.”

The smell of the powder is still familiar, but what my mother describes was undoubtedly when I was very young, and I have no memory of that. Anyway, it doesn't sound very pleasant, so I'm glad my mother is taking precautions. Of course it's a bummer to have to walk around in a diaper again, but I'm willing to put up with that in this case, and in a way it feels good to help my parents and my cousin out. Still, I will be glad when today is over.

After the diaper and the plastic pants, my romper is buttoned again. I realize that rompers normally have snaps between the legs, but these have small buttons with buttonholes. Of course, those won't open like snaps if you pull hard enough on the material - so it must be another safety feature. Then I

stand up, half curious, half apprehensive about what I will be wearing today. Yes, Bingo! My mother has again managed to find the worst possible thing in my closet: my Minnie Mouse overalls. When we were at Disneyland a few years ago, I was all excited about these, and kept whining until my parents bought me one. Of course I had to promise to wear them regularly, and they bought it at least one size too big so it would last. But once back home, I realized that I couldn't show up at high school wearing something like that, and so it stayed in the closet unless I really couldn't get out of wearing it. Bright red with white polka dots, a big Minnie Mouse on the bib, and even the buckles on the shoulder straps are the same shape as Minnie's head. I can't imagine anymore how I could ever have desired these.

I have no choice, and it's for a good cause, so I get over my aversion, and step into it, hoping that by now they're too small. But nothing of the sort, they even fit over the thick diaper pack, and the zipper on the side closes without a problem. The shoulder straps do require a lot of tugging, and when the buckles finally click around the metal buttons on the bib, I notice that they are pretty tight. The straps are not yet at their longest position, so I try to lengthen them, but my hands are pushed away. "Sorry Josie, the straps aren't adjustable right now; otherwise you could pull them over your shoulders if you made them long enough. I had to guess how long they should be, and unfortunately they turned out a bit tight, but I think it will still do, and we don't have the opportunity to adjust them again right now."

Then my father comes with a pair of black cable ties, and puts them around the buckles in such a way that they can no longer open. The loose ends are cut off, and then they are almost invisible, half hidden behind the button. By now I understand why it was important to them that I have already done my number two; it will probably take some time to get everything off again. I expect to get the harness back on as well, but they seem done, and we head downstairs for breakfast. In the process, my mother grabs the back straps of my overalls, and that way she has me under control at least as well as with the harness. With the shoulder straps, overalls are actually a bit like pants with a harness on top anyway, and so now that is being put to good use. There is no question of running away, and she can also steer me very well this way.

At the breakfast table, short straps hang from my chair in the corners where the seat and the backrest meet, which are put around my belt loops and closed again with little padlocks. This not only prevents me from getting up, but also forces me to sit up straight, which I am not used to, especially when I have just woken up. Actually, this has its advantages; I can reach the displayed foodstuffs more easily. After my initial hunger is satisfied, I inconspicuously try to see if I can release myself, but again, my parents have security in order, and I can't get the straps around the belt loops of my overalls loose at either end.

But maybe they have overlooked one thing after all. When my father, who is sitting next to me, walks into the kitchen to get something, I see my chance, slide my chair back, and stand up. The chair is like glued to my behind, so my hips remain folded, and my head and knees are forward, but I can still walk pretty well from my lower legs. I try to make a dash for the front door: after all, I don't have to go outside and risk people seeing me: touching it is enough. I can't look around very well; I have to watch where I walk, so I'm not sure how quickly my parents are reacting, but I get through the living room without any problems. But just as I reach the vestibule, and the door is only a few feet away, my chair is grabbed and put back on its four legs. Darn, failed. And I was so close!

"Sorry Josie, that was a good try, but just not good enough. Keep going like that, and we'll know where to take any additional measures." My father grabs me by the wrist, and leads me back to the table. He makes no move to untie me so I can walk back more easily.

I try, "Dad, not so fast," hoping that I'll be untied anyway, but he just replies, "You were fast enough a moment ago," and continues to pull me forward. At the table, they take a moment to see what they can do to improve security, and decide to park me in the other corner of the table, which normally remains empty because it's hard to get out of there without my mother having to stand up. They do release their hold on me for a moment, but I realize that it will be no use trying to run away again, and besides, my calves are sensitive from the bar between its legs that they collided with while trying to run. After I am installed in the safe corner we quietly finish breakfast, and then I am unlocked and taken back to the couch, where the same chain from last night is now clipped to the back of my overalls. For this, there is apparently now a connection point on the back piece. This time I have a lot less leeway, and can barely stand up.

As usual on Sunday morning we drink coffee together. Recently I am also allowed 1 cup a day, with lots of milk. I don't really like it yet, but with enough sugar it tastes a bit like mocha. And of course it is cool to drink with the adults; I am the first of my friends to be allowed to do so. After a while my father disappears into his little office; he still has a lot to do. My mother keeps me company, and when we have nothing more to talk about, she turns on the TV and zaps around. When Barbie Dreamtopia comes on, it reminds her of a doll I used to have, and we talk about it for a moment.

Then the front doorbell rings. I look at my mother, startled – wasn't I promised that no one was going to come by? Apparently it is unexpected for her too, because she shrugs her shoulders and goes to see who it is. I think I hear the neighbor's voice, and apparently there is something serious, because a busy conversation ensues. In any case, my mother doesn't seem to be asking her in, but I do take a critical look at myself anyhow. The overalls are hopeless, of course, but at least they seem to hide well that there is a diaper underneath, and the cable ties that keep me from taking them off are also barely visible. As long as I'm sitting with my back against the back of the couch, no one can see the chain holding me in place either. I must change the channel on the TV though; of course I can't be seen in such overalls while watching such a childish program. But the chain is too short, and I can't reach the remote on the coffee table. And my phone neither, which is still lying there from the previous evening.

I quickly sit back against the back rest to at least hide the chain, and then just hope that indeed no one comes in. After a while I relax a bit more; they seem to keep talking in the doorway. I have nothing better to do, so I watch the adventures of Barbie, and soon I am sucked into the story willy-nilly. Then the voices come closer anyway, and the two women enter the room. I quickly grab a pillow and hold it in my arms, so that at least the top of the overalls is covered. My mother says, "Josie, we need to take a look in the garden; there's something wrong with the fence. Just keep watching TV," and then walks quickly through to the kitchen, where the door to the garden is. The neighbor says hello to me, and because my mother keeps talking to her while she walks on, she hurries after her. I don't see any surprise on her part about my outfit or TV program, but she's also only in my line of sight for a short time.

Not having any other choice, I focus again on Chelsea and her older sister Barbie. The next episode is underway by the time the two women return, and once again they walk quickly through the living room, saying a final goodbye at the front door. Then my mother comes back into the room. Silently she sits back down in her seat, and watches the episode with me. Then she turns off the TV, and says, "I'm glad there was something on that you liked." Before I can deny my interest, she continues, "The neighbor had discovered that the fence was damaged during the recent storm, and had to take a look and take pictures on our side as well, for the insurance. I tried to brush her off, saying you're not feeling so well today and need the rest, but she wouldn't take no for an answer, since she apparently had to report the damage quickly."

I still feel angry, but my mother apparently did her best, and she also ushered the neighbor through the living room as quickly as possible, so I have little to blame her for. Except, "You shouldn't have put these stupid overalls on me; I look like a little kid who also watches Barbie on TV. The neighbor must have noticed, and soon she'll tell the whole neighborhood."

"You're exaggerating, darling. Those overalls look nice on you, and are very comfortable when you're not feeling so well, like I told her. Besides, she was only with her mind on the fence, and I didn't observe her noticing anything else at all. Again, I would have preferred not to, but I seriously don't think anything is wrong."

"I hope so," I reply somewhat depressed.

At that, my mother comes and sits next to me on the couch, gives me a firm hug, and strokes my head. "It will all be all right, dear. We really appreciate you helping us with this. And honestly, I haven't seen you this relaxed in ages, the way you were just watching TV. No rushing or complaining, not looking at your phone every moment, and not constantly wearing those earbuds with music. I wish you would be like that more often." Even though in a certain way I feel she is right, and that it is actually nice to relax like this, of course I am never going to admit it. But I don't know what to say either, so I don't get any further than sticking my tongue out at her. My mother ignores it; maybe she senses that I can't fully disagree with her. She gives me another hug.

And then suddenly I start crying. Mom asks me worriedly what's wrong, but I'm not sure myself. Between sobs I say, "I don't know. It's all so strange. And then the neighbor. And now suddenly you're so sweet to me..."

"It's probably just some stress finding a way out. Just let it out, you'll feel relieved." She continues to hold me tightly and rock me back and forth a bit.

After a while, fairly suddenly, it's all over again, and my mother gives me some tissues to wipe my tears and blow my nose. "Thank you Mom, I'm fine now." I heave a deep sigh, feeling somehow lighter. It has indeed relieved.

"Unfortunately I have to do some housework, because you are of no use to me today," my mother asserts with a wink. "Would you like to continue watching Barbie, or would you rather spend some time on your mobile?"

Ha Ha. At least, I'm assuming my mother is joking here. Therefore, I join in for a moment, pretending to be a toddler who can't reach something, and extend my arms to my mobile, "Phone, Phone." Of course, it's not that hard to pretend I can't reach it, because my overalls are indeed holding me back. Then, when I finally have my phone back in my hands, I quickly begin to clear my backlog of all the new messages.

Meanwhile, there is quite a bit of pressure on my bladder, after the coffee. I realize that asking if I can go to the bathroom is pointless, and that I have to do it in my diaper. But as unnoticed that apparently went during the night, the more difficult it is to consciously let go during the day while dressed and sitting on the couch. I try to find a position in which I can do it, but I am rather limited. Eventually I manage it while sitting on the edge of the sofa in the same position as if I were sitting on the toilet. What a relief. Due to the large flow, I can feel the fluid running down the sides as well, and it seems the diaper can't absorb it fast enough. I try to jump up to make sure it doesn't leak onto the couch, but am abruptly stopped, and fall back. Then I think about how it will be totally my parents' fault if my clothes and the couch get dirty, and that they will have to deal with that.

However, I still don't feel any wetness on the outside of the overalls, and gradually the wet feeling of the diaper disappears as well. All that remains is that it has now become noticeably thicker.

I turn my focus back to my mobile phone. I skip the links to the fun clips; I don't know how long I'll have, and of course I still have to make an attempt to escape. I start quickly after I have looked at and answered the most urgent messages. The chain is still firmly attached to the couch, to a ring hidden behind the cushions, and the other side of the chain is attached with a small padlock to a D-ring apparently set to the back of my overalls. That all feels too secure to pry loose. Then I test if I can't get my overalls off. However, the buckles are firmly secured with the cable ties, and I don't have anything within my reach that I could use to cut or sever them. The shoulder straps are too tight to pull over my shoulders, and as my mother mentioned, I can't make them any longer either. It feels frustrating to not even be able to take off my own clothes, but at the same time I have to admire my parents for their thoroughness.

But maybe they did make a mistake after all, for I can open the zipper on the side, and maybe reach my diaper that way. To do this, however, I first have to get the romper out of the way, and it's closed in my crotch with buttons, so just pulling doesn't help. However, I manage to get into the overalls with 1 arm, and reach my crotch. Because the shoulder straps are so tight, and the diaper is swollen, there is very little room for my hand, but after much fiddling I manage to open the first button of the romper. Then my hand needs a rest, so I pull it out again, and close the zipper just to be sure. This is just as well, because before I can continue with it, both parents come back into the living room and we have lunch. I am again secured on the chair in the corner. There are some extra goodies, and even a popsicle for dessert - they seem to be doing their best to make it a bit of a nice day for me.

4. The Final Stretch

After lunch, my mother asks about the condition of my diaper. I had almost forgotten by now, but report to her that it felt like it overflowed when I did a big pee, but that I don't seem to have any wet spots on my clothes. She consents to change me in a moment, but first they have another suggestion, "Josie, we had promised you that you don't have to go outside today. But meanwhile the weather has become quite nice, and we think it would be a shame to stay inside all day. Besides, it wasn't really smart of us to say that, because then we wouldn't have practice with Marco, and we won't keep them inside all the time either."

I already open my mouth to protest; after all, I can't afford for anyone to see me like this, especially someone who knows me. But I'm cut off, "Please listen to the whole proposal before you protest. We're not going to do this without your permission. We've been thinking about how we might do this, and so far we've come up with the following: you can put a jacket on over your overalls and the harness; then only the leash will be visible. Anyway, we will go to a remote area, and maybe not encounter anyone at all. And if we do meet someone, and you stay very close to us, they won't see the black leash at all, or else they won't see that it is a leash of a harness, and that you are secured with it. And to make it interesting for you, it also gives additional opportunities to earn your phone: if during the trip you manage to get more than 5 meters away from us, you have won the challenge as well."

That got me thinking. The red pants with white polka dots might be pretty noticeable, but if the top half is covered by a jacket, I don't think people will find them overly conspicuous or childish. And if the leash is indeed not noticeable while I stay close, and we go somewhere where it's very unlikely we'll run into acquaintances, we should be able to get away with this. So far, I haven't made much

progress in escaping, so I could probably use those extra chances. And to be honest, I don't really feel like being stuck on the couch all afternoon either. So in the end I agree.

Then they take me upstairs for a diaper change. To do this, of course, first my overalls have to come off. It turns out that the cable ties that secure the buckles are hidden behind the metal buttons on the bib, and they are pulled so tight that my father can barely reach them to cut them off. Finally, he manages to cut them with his hobby knife, holding a board between the overalls and my body to make sure he doesn't cut me if he slips. I would not like to do that myself, even if I had opportunity and a knife or scissors. Then the pants come off, and I'm strapped back on the table. There, my mother discovers the button of my romper that I managed to undo with great difficulty, and shows it to my father. Damn, now they're probably going to block that possibility too. If only I had started earlier to get the romper undone, I might have succeeded before lunch.

Once I'm secure, my mother continues changing me while my father leaves the room. Mom reports that there has been no leakage; apparently the leak guards have done their job well. With the clean diaper, she shows me that these are raised seals against my thighs, which should block the pee long enough to be absorbed. But of course those have their limits too, so it would be better if I just pee a little at a time, as soon as I feel the urge, instead of trying to delay it as long as possible. Hmm, maybe I should try that, because I certainly don't want to be walking around outside with wet and Minnie Mouse overalls smelling of urine. But that sounds easier said than done, when I think back to how hard it was this morning to let go.

When the diaper is on, my dad comes back into the room, and I'm put back on my feet. I try to watch out for another chance to escape, but I don't see any possibilities. And to my surprise, I don't actually feel any resistance in myself to being treated this way; you'd think it must be awful to be put back in a diaper, and to be tied up for it as well, but the loving care from my parents actually feels good, and even Mom seems to have found a balance where she takes good care of me, but doesn't treat me too childishly. As with a hairdresser, the grooming has a relaxing effect, and this makes me less inclined to attempt a wild escape.

When my overalls are back on, this time my father weaves a belt through the belt loops, pulls it tight, and pulls a cable tie through the buckle. "There, that should keep the romper closed." Then he takes 2 small padlocks from his pocket and snaps them around the buckles of the shoulder straps. I understand that they don't want to use knives again to cut the cable ties, and I'm fine with that, but this is a lot more conspicuous. It's a good thing I'll wear a jacket over it when going outside. Again, the clicking of the locks sends a shiver down my spine and an increase of my heartrate. Then the blue/black harness is put on, and over it a thin summer jacket. If you look closely, you can see small bulges of the padlocks, but my parents reassure me that no one will notice that, and even if, no one would know what causes the bulges.

In the car, I am put in the back seat - there is nothing special about that when both parents are present. But the seat belt is put through a sort of triangular piece of PVC that covers my chest between the hip and shoulder belts and extends across the whole width. Then a red piece of plastic is put over the belt buckle, and the buckle is snapped into it. The piece now sits over the red button you have to press to release the belt, and the slots in the plastic are too narrow for fingers to get between them. During the ride, of course, I try to see if I can get loose; if I had something narrow, like keys, cutlery, or whatever, I could probably just stick it through one of those slots to press the release button, but I don't have anything suitable, and with my fingers I can't achieve anything. Because of the triangular piece in front of my chest, I also can't manage to get my arm under the shoulder belt, so my upper body would at least be free. Then again, that wouldn't help me much if

the lap belt is still holding me in place, and I also heard the child lock on the door, so I can't get that open either. And I can't see myself jumping out of a moving car anyway.

In the parking lot where we come to a stop, there are indeed hardly any cars, and there is no one to be seen. Routinely I press the button to unfasten my seatbelt, but of course that doesn't work, so I have to wait patiently for one of my parents to come and unfasten me. That takes some time, because first they gather all the stuff, put a sunscreen behind the windshield against the sun heating up the parked car, and only when everything is ready my father comes to me. He first makes sure he grabs hold of the leash of my harness, before using his car key to press the red button on the belt and unbuckle me. Then I'm allowed to get out. He keeps the leash quite short, so I am held close to him while my mother continues to lock the car.

It is actually perfect weather; nice sunshine, but also a breeze so that it doesn't get too hot with my jacket - after all, that will not be coming off under any circumstances. We set off down a small path, my mother in front, then me, and my father in the back. The leash is kept longer now, so that we don't get in each other's way, but I am still regularly reminded that I am being held securely; if I go a little too fast, or walk a little more off the path, I feel the leash getting taut again and I can't go any further. Of course this is frustrating, but strangely enough I also feel protected and secure. Combined with the diaper and overalls, I feel more like I did when I was younger, and I catch myself skipping after a while, which I used to do very often.

After half an hour of walking, we have seen only one other person, with a dog, but they were walking on a path that crossed ours, and were not very close. Still, I made sure to stay close to Dad so the leash wouldn't be noticed. Some fifteen minutes later, however, a woman and a girl come towards us on our path. The girl looks to be about seven years old, and is frolicking around happily, with the woman, who is undoubtedly her mother, calling her back from time to time when she wanders off too far. Coincidentally, she also has overalls on, in pink, and pigtails in her hair. I realize she looks exactly like I feel, both the childlike clothing and the elation. Only she's not on a leash, although I imagine her mother would have wanted her to be, if that would be more socially acceptable, because now she constantly needs to be alert and call her daughter back.

Unabashed, the girl comes up to us, and says, "Hello, I'm Marlies." Of course, I'm right in front of my dad, hoping the leash won't be visible, but she comes up to me and says, "What nice pants!" She even sticks out her hand to feel the fabric. For a moment, I have the urge to pull my jacket up just a bit to show that they are overalls too, but then I immediately realize how incredibly stupid that would be and let my hands, which sneakily were already on their way, just straighten my jacket. I'm confident that as long as she's standing right in front of me, she won't see the leash at my back, but all the more worried that she'll notice the bulge of the diaper, or even feel it when she's touching my pants. So I back off a little, thereby colliding with my father, because for a moment I hadn't realized I was already so close to him because of the leash. I stagger a bit to regain my balance, at which the girl looks surprised. Then her mother calls out, "Marlies, don't bother those people. Come over here," holding out her hand. Reluctantly, the girl walks over to her and lets her mother take her by the hand.

As we pass, the woman mutters an apology to us, while my mother says it's no problem, and remarks what a cute girl she is. The latter waves to us for a moment, and then they have passed. When they're far enough away I breathe a sigh of relief - I was pretty tense from the encounter after all. A pity, really; in other circumstances I would have liked to hang out with the girl for a while, and make a garland for our hair out of daisies, for instance. But now I am just relieved that we are alone again, and gradually the tension falls away and I can enjoy nature and the sun again.

We are already quite far on the way back when I suddenly remember my mother's advice to pee a little at a time. But how do you do that, while you are walking and don't really feel the urge? At one point, we stop to look out over a small pond, and then I finally succeed as I stare at the water, imagining how I would swim in it with some friends and we would splash each other wet.

I still haven't made an escape attempt either. Already a little tired from the walk, and a little rosy from the warm sun, I have to make myself undertake something, by thinking about the prize. Only, when would I have the best opportunity? Trying to pull myself away now, when my father might not be so alert? But he has the leash wrapped around his wrist, so just pulling it out of his hand won't work. And of course I have to rely on surprise, because in terms of strength I am no match for him. In the end I decide that I might have the best chance while they try to get me into the car. Until then, I allow myself to relax and enjoy myself.

When I'm put in the car from the right rear door, I quickly slide through, open the left door, and try to dash away. But my father still has the leash wrapped around his wrist, and when I just get my feet on the ground I am abruptly stopped, and my head collides with the car door post. My father also yells "Ouch!"; apparently the tug on his wrist was painful, too. Tears spring to my eyes, I assume from the pain and the unexpected blow, but perhaps also a bit of disappointment that escape has failed again, and that I've hurt my father in the process. With a hand on the sore spot, I get back in, sit obediently in my spot and allow myself to be restrained. "Sorry Dad, I didn't mean to hurt you," I apologize.

"It's all right, girl, it was the agreement that you would try things, and now I know that wrapping the band around my wrist can also turn out to be sensitive. Let me take a look at your head. Well, I don't see any blood or swelling, so it doesn't seem serious. But let us know as soon as you get dizzy or nauseous, get a headache or see double."

"There's nothing wrong, really. It doesn't even hurt anymore; it was more the shock." But I let him go ahead and look at my head. The love evident in his concern feels nice. I wonder why such intimacy, so common in the past, is so hard to come by these days.

When my father is satisfied that there is nothing seriously wrong, I am buckled in, and only then does he loosen the leash from his wrist, rubbing it briefly. There hardly seems to be any damage there either, thankfully. Just a little red. Then we drive home, where I am installed on the couch again and even get my phone back for a while, while dinner is being prepared. It's a luxury not to have to help set the table.

During the meal, my parents bring up the fact that I am so much fitter and more alert today. Their conclusion unluckily is that they have neglected to enforce the rules about screen time in the evening, but that they will do so again from now on. For the sake of clarity, they repeat them once more: no computer or phone after 9:30pm, and no TV after 10pm. I would like to protest, but it is an existing rule, and by going against it I would be admitting that I did not, or plan not to abide by it. Besides, I can hardly deny that I slept well last night. Anyway, they won't find out if I'm still on my phone in my room or in bed every now and then, so it will all be fine, and in a few weeks they'll probably have forgotten all about it.

After dinner, my father looks at the clock and declares that the test is over. It is clear that I didn't manage to escape, and I'm pretty bummed that all the humiliation and escape attempts to earn my new phone have been for nothing. Apparently my parents think so too, because they come up with a new proposal. "Josie, we really appreciated that you helped us so much to prepare for Marco's arrival today, and we understand that it's disappointing that you didn't get anything out of it. Now,

you didn't win the challenge, and we're not going to give you the new phone anyway, but we do want to give you another opportunity to earn it.

"When Marco gets here, he will feel quite alone, away from his parents and brother and sister. Of course we'll try to do our best for him, but we also have to be strict with him and limit his freedom. Therefore, we think it would be very nice for him if you could help make him feel at home here, and be like a sister to him. If you are willing to do that, and carry out our requests to do so without protest, you will get your phone anyway."

Oh, that does sound interesting. But I'd better make sure I know exactly what they expect of me. "But will I have to walk around with a diaper and those stupid clothes for another number of days?"

"Oh no, you know Marco's brother and sister don't have disabilities either, right? No, what we have in mind is that you keep him company from time to time, comfort him when he's sad, and things like that. Everything else is normal; you choose what to wear, go to school, do your homework, and so on. Marco will also go to day care as usual, so it's only about the afternoons and evenings when we might call on you. You do need to be available outside of school hours, so you can't go to girlfriends or the mall those few days, and come straight home from school."

A few days stuck at home, and with a retard who can barely talk? That will be a bit of an ordeal, but if I only need to spend time with him a few hours per day, it's probably not much worse than babysitting a few times, and with that I would never earn enough to buy even the simplest smartphone. "But how long will he stay?"

"We can't be sure yet. It depends entirely on how soon his mother is discharged from the hospital. The plan is 3 days, but there can always be need for an emergency surgery that require them to move her surgery back, and if there are complications they may also want to keep her there a day or so longer. Then again, she's in fine health otherwise, so that doesn't seem likely. Let's say the deal is for a maximum of 5 days. If it takes longer, you'll have earned your mobile phone by then, so you're not required to comply when we call on you to support Marco."

"OK, I can live with that."

"As for diapers: we do want you to wear diaper pants again for the next few nights, just in case. Also because of last night. If those stay dry, we'll stop that again soon, but of course the next few days are rather unusual anyway, especially if you're sleeping on the couch, so we'd better be careful."

That's not really a surprise to me; even beside last night they would probably have required me to wear some protection while sleeping on the couch. And it's only for a little while anyway, because when everything is back to normal I'm sure I'll stay dry again, just like before. So I agree to that too, although I do pull a disapproving face for a moment to show that I'm not really happy about it.

Then I am finally released from the chair, and allowed to go my own way again. My mother asks, "Shall I help you out of your diaper, or will you keep it on until you go to bed?"

Stupid question - obviously I'm not going to keep walking around like a toddler voluntarily, am I? And besides, I've managed to wet it several times by now, so it's not very clean anymore either, and pretty thick. Before going upstairs my father unlocks the buckles on the shoulder straps and cuts the cable tie off my belt. Then my mother and I walk upstairs, I undress, and I climb on the improvised changing table. Of course, I don't have to be strapped down this time, but I joke for a moment, "Aren't you afraid I'll roll off?" at which my mom still loosely buckles the belt around my waist.

"Mom - that was a joke."

"I know, child, but you were right; safety first. As for me, it's good to keep that as a routine for with Marco. Come on, it'll be over in a minute. Just a little cleaning, and you can go back to wearing normal underwear. Would you mind to keep wearing your overalls for the evening, please? They look so nice on you, and you haven't worn them nearly enough."

Oh well, I guess I can put up with that for a few more hours then. If they are no longer locked, no longer have a diaper underneath, and no one else sees me... After all, they are rather comfortable, and I don't find them quite as repulsive anymore as I did this morning. So I shrug, whereupon my mother fastens the buttons of the onesie again, opens the table belt, and gives me the space to get off the table. I put the pants back on myself, although my mother can't help but adjust a twisted shoulder strap for me. Of course, those are still fastened so I can't extend them, but without the diaper under them it's quite okay, and I only feel it pull a little in my crotch during certain movements.

Then the test is really over and I can spend the rest of the evening doing what I like. Of course, top priority is reclaiming my mobile phone downstairs; the pocket on the overalls bib is actually an ideal storage place for it. I have to smile at the idea that it is close to my heart there, both literally and figuratively. I crawl back into my normal chair, and it turns out there is a nice movie on TV, so I watch it with my parents. Thinking back to last night, I get the urge to snuggle up between them on the couch again, but I don't think that's appropriate for someone nearly adult, nor do I want to encourage my mother to continue treating me like a child, so I stay in my chair.

5. No Normal Night

When the movie is over, my mother says, "I'm going to bed. Come, Josie, it's time for you to go to sleep, too. It's been an intense day."

I can't deny that, and without protest I get up. But then I suddenly realize, "But my bedroom still contains the crib! Where am I supposed to sleep tonight? We still have to put my old bed back."

"Honey, we can't go converting everything back now. You can choose whether you sleep on the couch or in the crib. Which can stay open, of course."

Hmm, why haven't I realized this before? Marco will arrive the day after tomorrow, so I still have 2 nights where I have a choice. After that it's the couch, anyway. Of course, that's not as comfortable as a real bed, and it's also clearly narrower than the crib. But the biggest disadvantage seems to me that I will probably be woken up in the morning by whoever is up first, even if I don't have to get up yet. And my privacy is gone in the evenings too, and I'm much more likely to be caught if I'm on my mobile phone too late. The cage bed isn't great either, of course, but I did sleep well in it, and if I can just wear my normal night clothes and the door stays open, that's probably the less objectionable option.

Upstairs I do my evening routine, put on a long T-shirt and diaper pants underneath. I tie the side door of the bed with a scarf to keep it wide open, so I don't have to wrestle with it when I go to the bathroom at night, and it can't accidentally lock. My mom calls out to check if I've put on diaper pants yet, which I confirm. But while I fell asleep quickly last night, now I lie awake for a long time. Thoughts about the past day, and what will be asked of me in the coming week keep me busy. In particular, I think back to my strange reaction to the padlocks and the door of this bed clicking shut. In addition to the negative feeling that the noise signaled I was really stuck, there was also something like excitement that I can't put my finger on. I don't know if it's because of these

thoughts, or perhaps because of the overalls that occasionally rubbed on my sensitive spots, but I notice that they want attention, and gradually my hand slides down between my legs.

Then I remember that I don't want to leave those kind of traces in the diaper panties, so I take those off for a moment before continuing to satisfy myself. It doesn't take long until a very nice climax, and then I go to the toilet to clean everything again, and also take a pee to make sure the diaper panties will stay dry.

On the way back I see my phone lying on my desk, and since I still don't feel sleepy I take it with me to bed, and before I know it I'm back to watching clips and reading posts. I know I have to go back to school tomorrow, but there's no point in lying around staring at the ceiling if sleep won't come.

Then suddenly my door opens and my parents come in. Quickly I put my phone under the pillow, but that is apparently futile. "Josie, we warned you earlier this evening that we aren't going to allow cell phone use after 9:30, and it's already 12:30!" I attempt to deny, but it's no use. "We've been hearing noises from clips and laughing for a long time, after that other thing."

Hearing? How so, their bedroom is not adjacent to mine. Then suddenly I realize the baby monitor is still next to my bed, and the green light is on. "Have you been spying on me? Do I get no privacy at all in my own bedroom?" I respond quite angrily, quite perturbed about my parents listening in while I was playing with myself, and also hoping to divert attention from my cell phone use.

My father tries to soothe a little, "Josie, sorry, we didn't mean to eavesdrop on you. We were just afraid that you might still have a hard time in this bed, or that the door might accidentally lock and you'd need us. And that if we turned it off now, we might not remember to turn it on again when Marco is here. We really didn't expect to hear you going on like this."

My mother, however, doesn't let herself be distracted, "Yes, that wasn't our intention, but it appears to have been necessary, anyway. It is now clear to me why you were so much fitter today, and normally have such a hard time getting out of bed, and that lately your school results have not been anything to write home about either. And are those the diaper panties lying there beside you?" Ouch. I had left them off until I went to sleep, and now of course they think I have been deliberately disobedient with those as well.

Then she nudges my father, who continues, "We've concluded that you obviously still need some help to go to sleep on time, and apparently also to wear your diaper panties as agreed. Therefore, we have decided that at least tonight and tomorrow night you will sleep the same way you did last night."

"You can't do that, I'm not a toddler!"

"Your behavior hasn't been exactly mature though. Would you rather we take your phone away from you for a week?"

"For a week? Then you might as well bury me right away!"

"Please don't exaggerate. Anyway, you didn't mind last night so much, did you? It is a punishment of course, but at the same time it will help you to establish a better day/night rhythm, so we actually thought it was rather appropriate."

Yes, compared to a week without a mobile phone it is perhaps not so bad, and in this way at least no one will notice that I am being punished. Defeated, I submit, "OK, then."

I have to go back on the changing table, where my mother fastens the belly strap considerably tighter than earlier. "Are you cooperating or do your hands need to be restrained too?"

"No, just do whatever you feel you have to."

It's clear that my mother is still angry, because it's a big difference how she puts a diaper on me now compared to earlier today. Not that she's hurting me or anything, but it's almost mechanical, and I find myself missing the love from earlier much more than I would have expected, and feel bad about it. "I'm sorry, Mom, and Dad. I just couldn't sleep, and I thought a little distraction would be better than just lying around thinking and worrying."

"I'm glad you recognize that what you did wasn't right. But in the future, just grab a book if you can't sleep."

"A book???"

"Yes, that works a lot better. That Internet stuff just wakes you up more, as does the blue light from the screen. Just a nice, relaxing book works great to take your mind off whatever it is you're fretting about. And you'll notice when you get sleepy, because you can't concentrate on the text as well as you should. Then you put the book away, and you fall asleep in no time."

Hmm, I already have to read a lot for languages at school, and I don't find that very relaxing. So to pick up a book in the evening as well? I don't think so. But I nod that I understand; this doesn't seem to be a moment to argue.

While my father is advocating for reading a book, my mother continues with the diaper, and my apology seems to have helped, as she starts doing it a little more lovingly. When she strokes my belly a little when she's done, I notice that my eyes even get a little moist, and I rub my hand over hers for a moment to show my appreciation. Strange that I can be grateful while being punished, yet it doesn't feel out of order.

Then I am put back into the sleep suit with the feet and mittens, and it is carefully closed at my back. After I have climbed into the bed, the scarf is untied and the little door clicks shut behind me. I grasp the bars of the door for a moment, rattling them as if I were a prisoner, which in fact I am. But my parents ignore this silent protest, and leave the room. Still frustrated at this undignified treatment, I look for a way to express myself. Then my eyes fall on Mr. Paddie, the teddy bear still standing obediently where he was left this morning. I start telling him what is bothering me, and how unfair it all is, so softly that my parents, hopefully, cannot hear me through the baby monitor, and he listens patiently and does not contradict me. Gradually, I settle down again and feel the safety the bed offers once more. I don't really want to fall asleep, to prove to my parents that their approach is nonsense, but those are my last thoughts before I sink into a deep sleep.

The next morning I am awakened by my mother, who gets me out of bed, frees me from the sleep suit and diaper, and then allows me go through my normal routine of going to school. I'm not as fit as I was yesterday, which isn't surprising since it must have been around 1 AM before I fell asleep, but I think I did sleep deeply, as I'm still fairly awake by now. Unfortunately, my diaper was a little wet again anyway.

In the evening, I'm sent upstairs before 10 PM, and I'm being prepared for bed in the same way. I already know that I have no chance to do anything against it, so I just let it all happen. After another good night's sleep and a wet diaper, I leave for school again, knowing that when I return Marco will

already be there. I'm not looking forward to it very much, but at least my punishment for sleeping in the cage bed is over, because that's where he'll be for the next few nights. And I'm also a little curious to see how things will work out, and to see him in the bed and the harness that has been used so effectively against me.

6. The Visit

There he lies in the crib, safe in his own sleep suit and with the bed-door locked. I sit next to him, holding his hand through the bars. By 'request' of my parents, although of course that's not very optional if otherwise I wouldn't get my phone. But honestly, I don't really mind; I remember how I felt the first time I was in this bed, and how nice it was that my dad stayed with me for a while until I got used to it.

And in the end, dealing with Marco is not as tedious as I had thought. Yes, his intelligence is limited, he doesn't talk much, and I sometimes struggle to understand what he says or means, but he's also a sweet boy, and I've already had to laugh a little when he's being naughty. I think he understands more than we think, and acts as if he doesn't understand when he doesn't feel like doing something.

This afternoon, when I came home from school, of course I said a brief hello, but had to do my homework first. But when my mom started to cook dinner, it was my job to keep him company. He was sitting on the couch, with his harness fastened just like mine on Sunday. At first he wasn't very willing to communicate, barely answering and trying to get away, and when that failed he was keeping his distance. Perhaps not that surprising, given that I hadn't been overly kind and patient with him in earlier meetings. In the end I just started telling him about myself, about school and such, and gradually I noticed that he relaxed more, and when I told him a funny incident, he even laughed. Then the ice was broken, and he gradually moved a bit closer to me. Apparently he had decided that I was OK, because since then he seems to trust me blindly, and even now he looks content as long as he can hold my hand.

Then he pats on the mattress next to him and says questioningly, "Josjie?". He always pronounces my name a little differently than it should be, but that seems to be the best he can make of it, so I quickly stopped to correct him. Apparently he wants me to lie down next to him for a while. To me it doesn't really matter that much whether I sit or lie next to him for a while until he is asleep. So I explain to him that that's OK with me, but that I need my parents to open the door, so I need to go away for a few seconds to take care of it. He nods, but at the same time continues to hold my hand. When I explain again, he finally lets go of it.

Before I can even start looking for my parents, my mother enters. I suspect she has already overheard over the baby monitor what Marco is asking for, because she immediately begins, "Josie, that's very kind of you to offer to lie with him tonight. I think that will go a long way in making him feel comfortable. Come on, I'll put a diaper on you." I start opening my mouth to protest that it was only supposed to be for a little while, but my mother briefly makes the gesture of a phone to her ear, reminding me that I must cooperate without protesting. Complaining about the diaper is no use either; the bed will have to be locked, of course, and for the past 2 days my diaper has been wet enough that diaper pants won't be good enough. I let the disgust show on my face for a moment: after all, I was not supposed to be locked in the bed and sleep suit anymore, and now I have to do it again. Then I resignedly climb onto the table, and get another thick bundle of protection on.

While I am still lying there, my mother whispers in my ear, "The sleep suit is not necessary today, but your cousin may be mentally like a younger child, physically he is an adolescent, with matching

hormones. So for your own protection, I'm putting you in one of your onesies, with a lock on the zipper, so he doesn't have a chance during the night to go explore what a girl's body looks and feels like." I can't imagine that timid, sweet boy would have sexual thoughts and feelings, but protesting is pointless, and is also difficult while he's right there. Actually, I'm already relieved I don't have to wear the sleep suit, with its feet and mittens, and that it's one of my own pajamas. If I can't get out of bed anyway there seems little reason why I would want to take off the onesie. Still it's irritating that I have to give up control over my own clothing, but after 3 nights I'm starting to get used to that as well. When I get the onesie on, she takes one of those little padlocks out of her pocket, pulls it through the opening in the zipper puller, and through something on either side of the zipper before clicking it closed; I can't see it well, but when I feel a moment later I conclude that there is a small D-ring on either side of the zipper. Those weren't there before, were they?

Then the bed-door is opened; Marco looks up for a moment, seeming to assess whether he can escape, but since I immediately climb into the bed and the door behind is quickly closed again, that's not an option. Then he gives me a wide smile, and when I've settled down next to him he grabs my hand again. The bed that seemed so spacious to me turns out to be a bit cramped for two people, and it's impossible not to lie against each other. After some experimenting, we both end up lying on our sides, looking in the same direction; a bit like he's sitting on my lap. He has grabbed my upper arm and is holding it firmly against him, as if I were hugging him. It's a little strange for me to be lying together like this with a cousin, but I can imagine him feeling secure and safe this way, and actually it feels nice for me too.

Not too long after that, I hear Marco's breathing become quiet and slow, and conclude that he is already asleep. My plan was to leave him alone at such a time, but, thanks to Mom, that's not an option anymore. And it's still early, so it will be a while before sleep will come. But there is nothing to do, and not even Mr. Paddie is there - I took him away because he is too personal to let Marco play with. My cousin is also still holding my arm hostage, so I can't even change my position. Listening to his breathing, however, also has a relaxing effect on me, and before I know it I've fallen asleep too.

7. Fair

The next morning, I am the first one to be taken out of bed because I have to go to school early; Marco will be picked up a little later for day care. He holds my hand for a moment when I try to get out of bed, but that seems to be more his way of saying he's sorry I'm leaving, rather than a serious attempt to stop me. After my onesie and diaper are off I can go my own way. At school it is a bit of a switch to dealing with peers and being mentally challenged, but I get used to it in no time.

Wednesday is only a short day at school, so early in the afternoon I am home again. Marco's day care is only in the morning on Wednesdays, so my mother has planned to take him to a kind of festivity for people with disabilities. It should be some kind of fair with stalls and activities, to commemorate some figure who is said to have done a lot for the rights of people with disabilities. My mother would like me to come along, both for Marco and because she herself could use an extra hand from time to time. After all, this is the first time she is taking him outside. I had hoped to have a little more time for myself, instead of spending the afternoon being surrounded by handicapped people, but since I don't have much choice, I just hope for the best.

When we walk past the coat rack on our way out, the blue and black harness we practiced with on Sunday is still hanging there. When Marco sees it, he points at it and shouts, "Josjie too!" Would he

really expect me to wear the harness and leash as well? I look questioningly at my mother, who shrugs her shoulders, and quickly calls her brother, Marco's father. Then she explains to me that Marco's younger sister still occasionally consents to wear her old harness to make Marco feel less alone. I shake my head wordlessly; do I really have to choose between being embarrassed in public and running the risk of being seen by someone who knows me, and the new phone that I've worked so hard for during the week?

Fortunately, I also see doubt on my mother's face. Marco seems to feel unerringly that there is no hard no, at least not yet, so he repeats his request, and reinforces it by grabbing the harness from the coat rack and pushing it against me, looking at me pleadingly with big eyes.

'How about we do it this way: you wear the harness under your jacket, but we only use the leash to and from the fair. When we arrive, I discreetly untie the leash, and no one else will see it.'

Hmm, if we do it that way it might not be too bad, and my mother seems pretty reasonable here - I get the impression I can still refuse without immediately forfeiting my phone. Irritatingly, that makes it harder to refuse, and with Marco looking at me pleadingly, I give in. A second later I'm already thinking, 'why on earth did I agree to this', but I feel I can't go back on what I said, and so I let my mother put the harness on me again. Then the jacket over it. She also immediately fastens the leash; I thought she meant to do that only when we got there, but realize that it's important for Marco not to be the only one when we leave, so I don't protest. With the car in our own driveway, no one will see it anyway.

Marco is put on the back seat with that triangular piece in front of his chest and the protective cover over the buckle. I have to sit in the back too, but with the regular seat belt. My mother explains that they only have 1 safety kit, but instructs me not to unbuckle the belt myself. The leashes she just leaves attached to our harnesses.

During the ride, I notice that Marco, when he thinks he is not being watched, tries to see if he can get loose, but, like I found out, it doesn't work. Apparently it is a bit of a drive; I think that is a good thing, because the further away we are, the less chance we have of running into people who know me.

When we arrive, it turns out to be a spacious playground, where you apparently normally have to pay for entry, because there is a large fence around the grounds, and people from the organization guarding the entrance. I manage to suppress my inclination to unfasten my seatbelt and wait obediently until my mother has collected her things. Then she unbuckles me first, and grabs the leash. Then we go to together the other back door and she helps Marco out. I stand with my back to the car, so others won't notice the leash. Marco, of course, has no reason to, and immediately starts walking towards the entrance, until the leash is tight. Then he comes back, grabs my hand, and pulls me along. I guess he has been here before, because I see no shyness, only enthusiasm.

Because my mother is still busy locking the car, and I'm along to support her, I slow Marco down until she's ready, and then we walk together to the entrance. Marco pulls my hand hard enough that I can't stay close to my mother, and my leash is also fairly tight. But there are children of all ages who are also leashed, or even in oversized strollers or wheelchairs. So I don't notice anyone looking at me strangely.

Marco is first at the entrance, where he gets a band around his wrist, like you also see at all-inclusive vacations. Then they want to put a band on my wrist as well, so I quickly say that I accompany him. They are surprised, because they have also seen my leash, and look at my mother. She says, "Josie, I

think you should accept one of those bands, then you can participate in everything and stay close to Marco. You'll regret it if you can only watch from the sidelines all afternoon.”

Hmm, either join in with the mentally challenged or hang out with the parents. The latter is generally not very interesting either; they usually talk about all sorts of things that don't interest me at all. There's also some booths along the sides, but as far as I can tell, they mostly offer supplies and services for the disabled; I'm sure I'll get bored of those quickly. And even with a band on my wrist, I can of course still sit on the side and spend time on my phone every now and then. Of course, everyone will think I have a disability too, but I don't see any other kids or young people without a band, so they probably think that anyway, and maybe some of the attractions are reasonably nice. So I stick out my hand, and soon there is also such a band on my wrist. It is sealed with pliers, and is tight enough that it won't go over my hand. Of course, they have to prevent the participants from losing their bands or deliberately taking them off.

Then my mother disconnects the leashes, and we can move freely within the grounds. Would she already have known that Marco can also run loose here? If so, her promise to me that the leash was only for the road was of course easily made. I get no time to think more about that, because Marco pulls me along to the big slide. Everywhere there are people wearing T-shirts from the organization to keep everything safe and peaceful. They don't explicitly check the wristbands, but I can see them paying attention, and I think that without a wristband I would have been accosted quickly anyway.

At first I'm still very self-conscious, doing my best not to appear too childish, but Marco's enthusiasm is contagious, and it's not long before I'm just letting loose and having fun. The attractions here may not be as exciting as for instance a roller coaster, but they're actually rather fun anyway. After a while, I feel like a kid again, and even have my face painted with a butterfly. Marco gets a kind of Spiderman mask painted on.

A little later, when I jump off a climbing frame, I almost have an accident. I can only just hold my pee. I quickly run to the building, where no doubt the toilets are. I call out to Marco that I have to go to the toilet, but I'll be back soon. He pats his diaper with a satisfied expression. I can't entirely disagree - carrying your own toilet with you has its advantages.

In the building I quickly find where to go. A volunteer, who is probably a bit younger than I am, asks if I need help. For a moment I feel insulted, but then I realize that her question will be relevant to many participants, and I thank her as kindly as I can muster at that moment. She points out a booth for me to use. I can't seem to lock the door, and the volunteer explains that today the doors cannot be locked. I can imagine why, and now understand why she pointed out a booth: she obviously keeps an eye out to make sure no one enters an occupied booth.

After I have finished, and walk back out of the building, my mother approaches me. “Josie, where have you been? I couldn't find you, and Marco was walking around by himself.”

“Mom, I was just visiting the bathroom. It was urgent, so I had to run.”

“Oh, I see. But you should have let me know anyway; now I missed you, while I assumed you'd be keeping an eye on Marco. If you're not with him I should know, because then I'll have to keep a closer watch on him.”

“Yeah, I get that, but then I would have done it in my pants.”

After a short pause, my mother responds, “I guess I should have put a diaper on you anyway. And keep you on a leash so I can't lose track of you.”

This is really going too far, and I open my mouth to say how ridiculous I think her reaction is; it's totally different that I played with that thought myself for a moment than when my mom says it like that. Then she can't keep her face straight anymore and bursts out laughing. She was just pulling my leg - something my mother rarely does, and so I wasn't alert for it. For a moment I am still angry, but then I start to laugh along heartily. Marco also comes running up, and laughs along, although of course he has no idea what it is about.

When we finally manage to stop laughing, she says, "I'm glad you came along, and are having such a good time," and gives me a kiss on my forehead, carefully aiming not to disturb the painted butterfly.

"Stand next to each other for a moment, and I'll take a picture. Your faces look great."

"Mom, I don't want others to see that I've had my face painted."

"Oh come on, there's nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"Mom! I'm almost an adult!"

"OK then, I promise to share the photo only with your father and with Marco's family."

At that I give up my resistance; Dad already knows everything anyway, and my uncle and aunt are probably only grateful that I support Marco like this. We pose for a few photos, and then Marco wants to quickly move on to the next attraction.

"Josie, I left some snacks in the car. Would you mind getting those for us? Then I'll keep an eye on Marco." She gives me her car keys, and I go without protest: I'm in the mood for a nice treat. But I am stopped at the entrance: participants are not allowed to leave the grounds without an attendant. I explain that I just want to get something out of the car, and show them that I was handed the keys for that, but they refuse to make an exception for me. That stupid wristband is now working against me. I go back to my mother, who understands that they were not allowed to let me through, so she goes herself, while I rejoin Marco.

Towards the end of the afternoon things start to calm down, and my mother calls us too: it's time to go home. Marco protests and begs to stay longer. I myself notice that I don't really feel like stopping yet - at home I have to get straight back to my homework, of course. But for that very reason, and because she has to take care of dinner, my mother decides we can't stay any longer.

At the exit, my mom reattaches the leashes to our harnesses, and the wristbands are cut off. I briefly consider protesting about the leash - Marco really doesn't need that support after this afternoon, but I've promised it, and the car is quite close by. And if I bring it up while he's present, I'm sure he'll act as if he still needs it.

Nothing noteworthy happens on the return trip, and at home I am immediately sent to my room for my homework, after the harness is taken off. Marco is installed on the couch again, and he gets to watch TV, with enough leeway to lie down, after this busy day.

As soon as my father is back we have dinner. He looks at me carefully and a broad smile appears on his face. It takes a while before I realize that I still have the face paint on. It comes off right after the meal. Actually it is a bit of a shame - it turned out very well. I take a selfie anyway; of course I'm not going to ask my mother for one of her pictures.

In the evening Marco wants me to sleep at his side again, and he keeps making a ruckus until we finally give in. I actually think it was pretty cozy last night, and the bed seems more comfortable than the couch even with 2 people, so I don't protest that much. I only complain to my mom that the fleece onesie is too warm. Last night I had tried to lower the zipper a bit, but of course the padlock blocked that.

'I do have an alternative, but I was afraid you wouldn't find it very acceptable. I'll get it for you.'

She returns with a one-piece suit of a thinner fabric, with half-length arms and legs. It has alternating orange and white horizontal stripes, reminiscent of an old-fashioned prisoner's suit. It also appears to close with a zipper between the legs. I understand why my mother didn't come up with this one right away, but it does seem a lot cooler, and if no one else sees me anyway....

After the diaper, I get the suit pulled on over my head. It appears to be a bit small for me, and it's a bit of a struggle before it's in place. I doubt if I could get it off without help for that reason alone, but after my mother pulls the two pulls of the zipper together in the middle, she once more puts a lock through both pulls, 'just to be sure'. I assume she is referring to possible inappropriate actions by Marco, but maybe she also still has the idea that I might want to take off my diaper, just because I wanted to keep it clean for a while on Sunday night. The padlock dangles right under my crotch, which actually seems quite fitting, since it also denies myself all access there.

Marco looks happy, and also satisfied, when I crawl back into bed with him and assume the same position as yesterday. He has succeeded again in getting his way. He crawls close to me and falls asleep quickly. With me it doesn't take long either.

8. Back to Normal?

There he lies in the crib, safe in his own sleep suit and with the bed-door locked. For the last time. It's Friday morning, and I have to be at school early. This morning my aunt should be discharged from the hospital, and Marco will be returned to his own home after day care. Of course, my aunt still has to take it easy, but they are apparently convinced that it is good enough that she is back home, and that my uncle takes over the heavier work and errands for now.

It will be really nice to just have full access to my room again, and to have my own big bed. And I have now officially earned my phone! No more nonsense with diapers, harnesses, being confined to bed and in my pajamas. On the other hand, I have grown a fond of Marco, and it was nice not to be the only child in the house for a change. Especially Wednesday afternoon we had a lot of fun. Yesterday was another long school day, and so I didn't have to be with him as much, but before dinner we played some games. What surprised me is how nice it is to be able to tell someone everything, without the risk of them judging, passing it on or using it against me.

I actually didn't even try to go to sleep on the couch anymore; I just kept him company for the last night. I'm almost going to miss cuddling up against such a sturdy guy at night. Stupidly, my eyes are moist when I say goodbye to Marco through the bars, and this time he really tries his best to hold me, but I can't be late for school, so I finally pull away, leaving him behind.

When I get home in the afternoon, Marco is indeed gone, and his things have been cleaned up as well. In my room there is only the crib left. I assume my father will take it apart when he gets back from work. My old bed will probably be put back until we can arrange a new one for me, I guess.

But when he doesn't seem to be inclined to do so after dinner, I ask him when he is going to take the crib away. But to my surprise I am told, "That's your new bed now. You don't think we bought such an expensive crib for those few days, do you? It will help you sleep at night instead of spending half the night on your phone."

Oh no, I didn't expect that! Of course, this also means that I can't go to the bathroom at night, and so the rest of the stuff will continue to be used. And, although my parents don't mention it explicitly, of course that will also mean that I won't have the opportunity to play with myself at night anymore. I realize that things are going to be pretty different around here from now on!

THE END