

Circles within Circles

Chapter Twenty-Two – Catch and Release

October 2022

Whaaat? Hub? Where- where am I? Nice- nice dreams. Sparkly... unicorns...

Anneke struggled to force her eyes open, blinking away the grit of uncounted hours of sleep. Through her mind still swirled echoes of dreams, snatches of tinkling melodies, half-remembered visions of... what, we was no longer quite sure. Something about playtimes... fun... being a good girl... letting go...

And then, as her consciousness slowly seeped back, she came to the realization that she was lying amid a heap of pastel blankets. In a little single bed with secure railings on the side – precisely the sort of bed a toddler might use. Next to her, she realized with a start, was a pale yellow bunny, its long ears still clutched tightly between her fingers. She squirmed away – only to feel the cool touch of plastic and rubber against her forehead. *What the-*

It was a bulbous adult pacifier, lying innocently beside her on the pillow.

But before she could register anything more than disorientated incomprehension, she heard a low laugh from across the dimly-lit room, and then a clicking of heels. Into her upturned gaze now appeared the grimly beaming face of Queen B... and she was already chuckling before Anneke had even fully comprehended what she was seeing.

"Aww, look who's waking up at last! You've been quite the high-maintenance little girlie these last few days," she smiled, though the mirth never reached her cold eyes. "Is my sweet little princess finally ready to play?"

Anneke fumbled through her fogged brain for words. "Uhhh... what- what's happening? Where's... Ethan?" At which Queen B clucked and shrugged carelessly across the room. "Oh, that little stinker? He's locked away right over there, safe and sound in his crib! Exactly as he should be." She turned her gaze back to Anneke, and now there was a gleam of calculating glee in her eyes. "Don't worry! You're basically his big sister now, so don't worry – you'll get to play with him. Once you're changed and dressed, of course..."

Changed? Anneke's mind wasn't so muddled yet that she'd forgotten what that verb meant. Changed. That was something for babies. Babies. She wasn't... baby. "But- but I'm okay," she

began, as she worked to untangle herself from the sheets. "I- I don't need-"

And then she felt it. Heard it. The soft, puffy crinkle beneath her cartoon-covered pajamas. The subtle rustle that meant only one thing.

Queen B was laughing again as she squirmed free, sitting up and tugging anxiously at the waistband of her pajama pants. "Oh, sweetie, you honestly don't think you need a change? I think *I* will be the judge of that!" And before Anneke could resist, the woman's long nails were poking and prodding at the padding between her legs. "Oh, maybe just a *little* wet," she conceded with an air of evident disappointment. "But that's no problem. They certainly won't stay that way for long!"

Before Anneke could react, her upturned gaze caught the motion of the woman's lips. Her ears registered a weird pattern of syllables. And before she could blink, her mind was reeling as if suddenly caught in a dizzying whirlpool. The room spun, her body twitched and spasmed, and then...

Quiet.

Huh? Who was this pretty lady staring down at her? Why was she looking so happy? Maybe... maybe she wanted to play? She wriggled down from her bed and giggled as her toes sank into the carpet, thrilling to the delightful sensation. *Ooh, tickly!* But then she suddenly became aware of a funny rumble in her tummy, and the thick dryness of her thirsty mouth. And so, she instinctively opened her mouth to express her feelings.

"Hungwy! Me hungwy!" She insisted, suddenly caught up in the sheer power of her little emotion. "Bweakfast, Mommy!" Why she was saying "Mommy" didn't require an ounce of thought. Of course this lady was Mommy! Of course Mommy was going to bring her breakfast. Nice, yummy oatmeal in her pretty pink princess bowl, just like always...

"Oh, of course, sweetie!" the nice woman laughed, and little Anneke found herself giggling in response. "But honey, haven't you forgotten something? What do we do when we wake up, honey? Can you remember?" Anneke's face screwed up instinctively in thought, as the swirl of breakfast and Mommy and tickly carpet and sparkly unicorns flitted through her mind. *Hmm. Wake up. Gotta do... something. Something every good girl does...*

"Uh-huh!" she crowed at last, elated to at last have recalled it. Forward she bent, down she squatted, and with a forehead wrinkled in concentration braced her muscles for the task. "That's

right, honey!" she could hear Mommy commending, and she let out a little grunt of delight in response as the first wet hiss of urine blossomed out between her legs. "Better out than in, remember? Good girls always let it go – just like Elsa there on your pretty nightgown..."

"Uh-huuuhh..." Anneke murmured, for the moment oblivious to all but the delightful sensations of being a such good girl. *Let it go. Squat down, let it all out. Nice and wet and warm, just like Mommy said. Just like in her dreams...*

But suddenly before she could even straighten up, another pattern of syllables sounded. The room shifted and veered crazily around her. And then, as she gasped and twitched and blinked, she came back to reality. Only to find... well, her adult self. Standing with bent knees and a saturated, already-leaking pull-up hanging between her legs, the darkening streaks of her very intentional accident snaking down the legs of her pastel pajamas.

"Oh, what's the matter, honey?" Queen B cackled, and Anneke shuddered as she shifted uneasily in place, her face beet red as she realized what she'd just done. "Why the blushes, baby? That wasn't *your* doing – that was all *Little Anneke's* fault? She dearly loves her pull-ups, you know. Though to be honest, I think she'd be much happier – and my carpet would be much safer – if we took them away and replaced them with something *much* thicker..."

What- No, no! This was- this was too much! Back into her horrified brain now surged all her adult memories: how she and Ethan had been captured, how he'd been forcibly regressed, how she'd guiltily agreed to the 50/50 deal. Oh, god... That's what was going on. Queen B had somehow trained her – implanted triggers, maybe – to toggle her between her normal self and...

Well, whoever Little Anneke was. Clearly a little kid with very little potty-training and even less desire to be trained.

"Oh, don't worry!" Queen B managed between her gales of laughter. "Honey, you agreed to this, after all! And listen: now that I'm done playing, you and your precious Ethan can both go on your merry way. We've already given him back some of his adult brain – though," and here she leaned down and ruffled Anneke's blonde hair affectionately, "Honestly I liked him better when he was a complete B-Class. Still, that's what we agreed on, and I'm not one to go back on my word."

Anneke nodded, fumbling sheepishly at the soaked pajamas around her waist as the full weight of the woman's words began to sink in. But Queen B cut off her introspection with a wry glance at her soggy crotch and an impatient gesture toward the closet. "Oh, go on! Go change your stupid

pull-ups and get dressed however you want. Your tickets back on the noon train are already bought, though, so maybe you'll want to wear something a *little* less juvenile if you're going to be seen in public." Anneke nodded wordlessly and waddled awkwardly toward the closet, relieved to find there at least one skirt, blouse, and lingerie set that wasn't entirely pink or covered in glitter. *Finally, we're on our way out! Just keep your head down, focus, do as you're told-*

Once she'd slipped free from her urine-soaked clothes and hastily tugged on her adult outfit, Queen B sneered and waved her toward the crib along the opposite wall. Within it, she could already hear the creak and rustle of Ethan beginning to wake – and as she approached, she found herself staring down into the sleepy, now strangely adult gaze of her erstwhile boyfriend.

Ethan! You- you're back! You're yourself! Maybe it was still the regressed part of her brain, but she could have cried from relief and joy at seeing him sitting up in that crib, plucking the massive pacifier from his mouth and staring up at her, lips parted in uncertain joy. "Hey," she began, her voice trembling with emotion. "Hey, Ethan..."

"Aww, go on, then!" came Queen B's sarcastic voice from behind her. "Change your pissy little baby boy before I trigger him back. I'm being far too nice already, letting you two get off so easily..."

Anneke scrambled to comply, helping her blushing boyfriend out from the crib and the onesie and thoroughly soaked diaper in which he'd waken. Reasonably adult clothes too they found for him, and before they quite knew it, there they were: adult once more, dressed, and standing shaken and relieved before their mistress.

"Well, just look at you two lovebirds," Queen B commented drily, though in her voice there was a strange and unexpected note that – had it been anyone else – Anneke might have taken for envy. "Off you go, then. Grunt has some breakfast ready for you. You're free to go whenever you like after that – on the train, like I said..."

And as they both muttered their obsequious thanks, Queen B sighed and held up a warning hand. "Oh, don't think you're totally off the hook now! You're both fifty-fifty, remember?" She inspected her claw-like fingernails reflectively. "It's a bit of a special case, you know. I've never tried such an arrangement before. But believe me, I'll make sure you get to enjoy your little... what shall we say? Souvenirs? You know, that lovely hypnotic programming that makes you mine..."

Anneke gulped and nodded, her hand tightening on Ethan's. Here it was, then. The catch. The poisoned cup. The fine print of their deal with the devil. "We have your contact info, dears," Queen

B asserted. "We're tracking you. And we know *exactly* how to trigger you two. So all you need to do is wait for my triggers, and send *me*-" she tapped her chest and smiled dangerously, "proof. Every day. Send me at least one photo or video every day showing me what good, obedient, dumb little babies you still are. And if you don't..."

"Well." Her tone was dry, clipped, so detached and free from passion that it was positively chilling in its finality. "We'll bring you back here for retraining. And the second time around, I don't think either of you will have the chance – or the brains to even *want* – to leave me again."