

"Excuuuuuuse me miss? Do you have any Dream of Halloween shirts around here? I know I've seen them on a rack before."

Manny's voice got higher and louder the third time he asked, but it didn't help. The girl behind the counter continued to leaf through a magazine titled DIE, acting like she was the only one in the store. She didn't even look in his direction. She simply snorted and shook her head as she continued to read, mumbling something to herself about someone named "Johnny Stabs" and "looking like a dumbshit."

Manny, someone who prided himself on his patience, slammed his paws on the counter. The orange, sharp-toothed critter behind the register finally looked over. Her thick tail whipped around dangerous behind her, the spade on it looking sharp enough to make the mouse gulp. A dirty vest framed the words on her t-shirt (Kill All Band Members) perfectly. The mouse looked like he could barely control his annoyance, his hands gesticulating wildly as the employee stared blankly at him.

"Oh, *now* you notice me? I've been trying to get your attention for a minute, for a simple question! Do you even work here?"

"Nope," Lenore said, turning her back to him immediately, thumbing through her magazine once more, "I'm on lunch. Buzz off dumbass."

The mouse's face got ugly, pinching up to hold back the explosion that was welling up inside him. He slammed his paws on the counter again, and proceeded to shake it a little, but Lenore did not react in the slightest. He scoffed, stomped, and turned around.

"I'm out of here, and never coming back!" It was less of a threat and more of an angry goodbye, Manny fully expecting to leave without another word from the horrible girl. As he stomped out however, his ears flicked. The word was almost imperceptible, but it was dripping with arrogant satisfaction.

"Good."

"Aghggh!" The mouse screamed and left. Lenore could still hear him making weird angry noises long after he was out of sight, and as soon as he was, she let out an ugly laugh.

"Hah! Stupid piece of shit. Like I'm here to help a loser like you," she said, turning back around and rolling her eyes, "As if. They're lucky I bother to show up to this dump." She punctuated her statement by spitting her gum out of her mouth over the counter. It ended up landing smack dab on the front of a *Our Little Horsie* shirt, which prompted another horrible cackle from Lenore.

"Hah! Stupid little baby horsie shit. Why do we have all this toddler crap here?" She narrowed her eyes as she stared at it. She briefly entertained the idea of smearing the gum across the shirt to ruin it further, but since that would require her to walk around the counter, she just sneered at it.

"Afternoon shift sucks," she muttered, slumping back into her surly position against the wall, "Smoke break can't come soon enough."

That's when *she* appeared. She looked like a normal young cat. She barely came up to Lenore's hip, was 100 pounds soaking wet, and had a cute little pink bow in her hair and a small purse around her shoulder. Besides the fact that someone so cute and innocent looked a bit out of place walking into a Hot Topic, there was nothing strange or telling about little Eliza whatsoever. What a shame, for Lenore's sake.

Lenore didn't even notice her at first. The little girl didn't make much noise outside of humming softly to herself as she walked down the walls and weaved through the racks. It wasn't until Eliza accidentally knocked over part of an end cap that Lenore looked up from the top of her magazine, and when she saw what happened, she scowled.

"Sorry miss," Eliza mumbled, looking embarrassed. Lenore gave her a venomous look, and went back to her magazine, muttering darkly to herself.

Eventually Eliza's browsing brought her close to the register, where Lenore could no longer ignore her humming. Something about it was driving the older girl up a wall, and while she didn't know why, she also didn't really care. She was already waiting for any opportunity to snap something extremely rude in the young girl's direction when Eliza gave her the opening she was waiting for.

"*Our Little Horsie!*" Eliza cried out, ecstatic. She thumbed through the shirts with unrestrained excitement, crying out with delight every time she saw a different character splashed across the front of a shirt.

"My favorite, they're all here!"

"Pffft, shoulda known," grumbled Lenore, shaking her head. The smile on Eliza's face had fallen, if only a little, when she turned to look at Lenore. The churlish employee saw that she had struck a nerve and lapped it up, pushing forward.

"You kids love that stuff, don't ya?" Lenore smirked, lowering her magazine. Eliza's cheeks flushed, and she looked back and forth between the shirts and rude girl a few times.

"Yeah, I love *Our Little Horsie*. It's my favorite show. Is that bad?"

Lenore let out an awful laugh that sounded more like a bark, and threw her magazine on top of the counter. She leaned over, to make sure the little girl saw her wicked expression.

"No no, it's a fine show. Really good show for little babies," Lenore smiled evilly and continued, "Perfect if you're a little bed-wetting baby who wears diapers and is afraid of the dark. Perfect for stupid, immature kids. Like you, right? You're a stupid fucking baby, aren't you?"

Eliza's smile slowly morphed into a frown, and her eyes began to narrow. Something about the way she was staring back at Lenore should have been a big red flag, but the orange critter was having too much fun being an asshole.

"Oh look, little horses," Lenore said in a high pitched tone, mocking the young girl, "I love little horses, because I'm a widdle baby who can't control herself and has no taste! I can't wait to get made fun of for wearing the lamest shirt imaginable at school, especially cuz I'll deserve it! Oh no, I wet myself again! Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Lenore fake cried for ten seconds straight, only stopping when she noticed that Eliza indeed looked like she was on the verge of tears.

"Oh what, are you going to cry now? Is that what you're gonna do, baby? Why don't you go back to mommy and beg for your bottle."

"I'm not a baby," was all Eliza said, her tone reminiscent of an encroaching thunderstorm, "You are."

Lenore burst into uproarious laughter. In no time flat she was laying over the counter, cackling and pounding her hand on the glass, clearly playing it up to embarrass the young girl worse.

"Nice comeback kid! Did your kindergarten friends teach ya that one? Hahahahah!"

"You'll be sorry!" Eliza suddenly yelled, stamping her foot and staring at the wicked woman. Lenore's laughter finally ceased, and she looked down at the child, giving her the most bored look she could.

"Sorry how? What are you gonna do, tattletale on me? Piss your pants? Throw a tantrum and knock everything over? Go ahead kid, I don't care about this place anyway. I'm not gonna clean it up."

"You'll see," Eliza mumbled, as their gaze met, "You're the baby."

Lenore shivered from tip to tail, as something, but she wasn't sure what, washed over her. It was an odd feeling, one she couldn't describe with words. More like something she felt, deep inside. Or maybe it felt like she wasn't feeling something now that she was feeling a few minutes ago? It was weird, and she didn't like it, so she reacted how she always did to something she didn't understand. She got meaner.

"Look kid, I don't have time for your stupid shit you little idiot," she said, leaning over the counter, her voice a threatening whisper, "So leave my store, and don't come back until you stop wetting the bed, capiche? If you don't, I'll throw you out myself."

Eliza continued to stare back at her for a moment, face set like stone. She didn't look like she was going to cry anymore, far from it. In fact, to Lenore, she was starting to look smug. Which Lenore did not like one bit. Lenore was preparing herself to walk around the counter and drag the kid out, kicking and screaming if she must (and hoped), but right before she did Eliza's gaze relented.

"Fine," the child said with a sniff. She turned away from Lenore and walked out like she owned the place, while Lenore continued to stare at her as she walked out. The whole time Lenore imagined all kinds of horrible ways to bully the poor girl if she ever came back, to the point of where she almost hoped that she would, just so she'd have the opportunity.

She was still fantasizing about it a half an hour later, when business began to pick up for the afternoon. It was only a handful of people, but it was enough to make Lenore complain, of course.

"Uggggggghhhghgh," Lenore groaned, loudly, "I hate when there's a rush, why do so many losers shop here?" Upon hearing this, a few people left in a huff, while the patrons more familiar with the misanthropic woman acted like they didn't hear her.

"*Yeah it's so loud, I hate all this noise! It's nicer when it's quiet,*" said a new little voice in Lenore's head. One that, if she was paying any attention, might have sounded weirdly familiar. That was a lot to ask of someone who didn't even bother to lace her boots up properly, though.

"Ugh, I know, this shit sucks," she said aloud to herself, without even thinking. In her effort to sneer at each customer in the store individually, she saw that a doll display had gotten knocked over. She stomped over to clean it up, growling the whole time.

"Why even clean this shit up? It's just gonna get knocked over again anyway," she mumbled to herself as she picked up goth versions of Raggedy Anns and Andys, "This whole store cares way too much about being clean." An absolute lie, but it justified what she felt was righteous indignation.

"*Yeah, it's more fun when things are messy. You love knocking things over!*" The voice said, and once again, she didn't even think twice about what it told her, or how familiar it was.

"Yeah!" she shouted, knocking down all the dolls that she just placed back on the shelf. Even the patrons that could manage to withstand her horrendous attitude raised a few eyebrows at this.

"Stupid dolls," she muttered, stepping on the face of goth Raggedy Andy. She smirked as she smeared his face across the sole of her boot, and she went to grab a goth Ann. As she was about to knock it down to the floor with the rest though, the voice piped up again.

"Hey, Raggedy Ann is cool! She's a girl like you, you like her."

That got Lenore to pause, if only for a moment. She looked up, like she was trying to see her own head or something, and then looked down at the doll, studying it carefully. She tossed it around in her hands, back and forth, until it bounced in an odd way and fell to the floor.

"Ah!" Lenore yelped and dove to the doll, not just picking it up, but clutching it to her chest, in a protective hug. She eased up on the hug to make sure that the doll was okay, and when she did, she suddenly became aware of what she was doing. The gazes of several customers were upon her, and her face got a bit hot.

"I guess she's kind of cool. Nice dress," Lenore muttered under her breath, trying to act nonchalant as she carefully placed the doll back on the shelf. She sullenly walked back towards her counter, but before she could retreat behind it, some teenage bear girl slid in front of her. She was holding an *Our Little Horsie* shirt, specifically the one with Lenore's disgusting piece of chewed gum embedded in the front.

"Excuse me, ma'am," started the bear, her voice soft and apologetic, "I found this shirt with gum on it."

Lenore rolled her eyes as loudly as she could, and leaned down to frown right in the girl's face.

"Yeah, and why should I care kid?"

"I-I don't know," the girl whimpered, faltering fast, "I thought you should know."

"Gimme that!" Lenore said, ripping the shirt from the girl's hands and standing up straight. She stared long and hard at the shirt, specifically at the gum smeared across the horse's face. Several different vitriolic sentences fought to escape from her snout at the same time, but as she started to open her mouth, the voice interrupted..

"You love Our Little Horsie. It's one of your favorite shows! Everyone's so nice and cool and pretty."

"What?" Lenore said, finally aware that this voice was not her own. Something was off, something was weird, and she knew it. She didn't like it. She opened her mouth again, but as she did, there it was.

"Don't you think Whinnyfred the horse is cool? Of course you do. She's classy, polite, and well-dressed. The only reason you wouldn't is because you're more of a Blackjack kind of girl."

"I, no, no way," she muttered. What was going on? She couldn't stop staring at the shirt, but she also couldn't manage to bad mouth it like she so desperately wanted to. Did she really like this stuff? What was this voice? She shook herself out of her light trance and forced herself to frown, preparing herself to simply scream "Fuck horses!" at the top of her lungs. She didn't get to utter a single syllable however; the voice, while soft and childish, spoke with a firmness Lenore could not ignore.

"You like Our Little Horsie, it's one of your favorite shows. You can try to deny it all you want, but it's true."

The word "true" rang through her head like church bells. She couldn't stop hearing it or thinking it, no matter how hard she tried. She wanted to cry out, but before she could, she was pulled unceremoniously back to earth by the teenage bear.

"Uhhh, ma'am? Are you okay?" The bear's face was a mixture of worry and fear, and she'd taken several steps back at this point. Lenore, still a bit dazed and now feeling embarrassed to boot, turned away. She snorted dismissively, or at least she hoped she sounded dismissive, but she couldn't stop herself in the end.

"I'm fine, thanks. I'll take care of the horsie." Lenore practically sprinted into the back room with the shirt in tow. She had to get away from the probing gazes of the customers before her face melted off from embarrassment.

"What is wrong with me?" Lenore mumbled, throwing the shirt aside as soon as the door closed behind her.

"Am I hungry? Tired? Maybe I need a smoke." Lenore paced through the back room, reaching for any explanation she could. She reached into the pocket on her vest and grabbed her pack of cigs, but as soon as she did she let out a long, low moan.

"GooooOOOoooooddammit," she howled, "I can't take my break until that dumbass Marty gets here!" She growled and stuffed them back into her pocket, pacing a bit more instead of going out onto the floor like she should. She was looking for any excuse to justify going out for a smoke, but it never came. Something else did, though.

"You're so fussy. A cigarette might help, but you know something better. You remember how good it felt, don't you?"

"What, what am I, you..." Lenore shook her head to dislodge the voice, but it continued unabated.

"Go ahead, suck your thumb. Just for a second. It'll feel really nice, you know it will."

It made no sense. It was extremely embarrassing. If anyone saw her, especially one of these loser customers, she'd never be able to live it down. And yet her hand still closed, her thumb stuck out, and she stared it down as her hand moved on its own towards her mouth.

"N-no, I... ohhh.... mmmmm..."

She could not believe she was in the back room at work sucking her thumb, but here she was. Not only that, but it really was calming her down. Her breathing slowed down considerably, and with each exhalation her tension dissipated more and more. She slumped against a wall, and her body slid down it until she was sitting on the floor. Thirty seconds in and she was actually smiling around the thumb in her mouth, still sucking away. It wasn't just enjoyable, but oddly natural. She might have fallen asleep back there, as comfortable as she was, if not for the knocking on the door.

"Excuse me, is someone back there? I want to make a purchase," came a muffled voice from behind the door. The voice was calm and patient, but Lenore bolted upright anyway, and whipped the door open.

"I'm here calm down!" Lenore yelled, trying to hide her scarlet face as she ran past the customer and towards the register. The calico colored rabbit shrugged and followed her over, throwing a chain wallet and a couple of t-shirts onto the counter while Lenore tried to steady

herself beneath it. Eventually she rose up from the floor, looking far less red but more irritated than ever.

"Hope your day's been well," the rabbit said, not really paying attention to Lenore as he looked around the store. Lenore grunted in response. Usually she would have said something shitty about his purchases or haircut, but at the moment she was trying not to think about how good it felt to suck her thumb and, even worse, how bad she wanted to do it again.

"It's okay to want to do it," the voice in her head teased, *"You're just a little kid. You can't help it."*

"I am *not*," Lenore growled under her breath.

"Excuse me?" The rabbit turned to face her, his expression inquisitive.

"N-nothing!" Lenore stammered back, her voice cracking and her face getting red once more.

"Okay," the rabbit said with a shrug, "So how much do I owe ya?"

"Little kids aren't good at math."

"Uhhhhhhh..."

Lenore, for the life of her, couldn't repeat the number on her screen. She'd seen it before. She was sure that she knew it. Why couldn't she say it? Why was it so hard? Everything felt like it was getting lost in a haze, and the rabbit's face was getting impatient.

"Is there some sort of problem here miss?"

"I, I, one sec, okay?!"

"Kids don't know how to work this stuff."

Lenore stared harder at the screen, but it didn't help. She saw the numbers, but they were meaningless. She felt like she might cry, which was even more uncharacteristic of her. Why was everything so big and scary suddenly?

"The, th-this many," Lenore finally replied, turning the screen in his direction.

"Excuse me?" The rabbit's face had gone from annoyed to incredulous. Lenore was feeling smaller by the second.

"This many monies please," Lenore said. She was on the verge of realizing what she was doing, but she was so distressed she still couldn't see it. She just wanted this transaction to be over with, and was tapping the screen that read \$33.84 impatiently.

"Uhhh... sure," the rabbit said, pulling a card from his pocket and holding it out for Lenore. Lenore stared at it blankly.

"Uhhhh, fwee stuff today!" Lenore suddenly piped up, flipping the screen back around and pushing his card away.

"Wait, what? What are you talking about? Are you okay?" The rabbit no longer seemed mad, but instead genuinely concerned, if not very confused.

"It's all fwee mister, you can have it! I don't need any monies today!" She was already hastily stuffing his clothes into a bag, and pushed it into his hands.

"Have a nice day mister!"

"Miss is there something wrong, did something happen?"

"Nope, nope! Just tiwed. It's nap time, so you should go."

"But this-"

"Go or I'll hold my breath until you leave!"

"Alright alright Jesus!" The rabbit ran out of there as fast as he could, refusing to look back as he did so. The few remaining customers that saw that spectacle were not far behind. A few minutes later Lenore was once again alone, and now completely aware of what she had just done. She started to wish very hard that it really was nap time, and that she could fall asleep and forget about all this--Instead, she sullenly shuffled behind the counter and began to suck her thumb.

A half an hour later, and there was a new problem. Marty still wasn't there yet (Which wasn't a surprise, Marty was often late.), and Lenore had to use the bathroom. Really, really badly. Normally she wouldn't have minded that much, but today the prospect of holding it in seemed impossible. She began to bounce on the balls of her feet, staring at the door and hoping Marty would walk through at any moment.

"It's easier if you bounce around. It distracts you!"

"No, no..." Lenore whimpered, knowing full well how foolish she'd look, "I'm not some baby!" It sounded less like a declaration and more like a desperate plea, now.

"You are a baby. Babies do the potty dance."

"I don't wannaaaaa..." Lenore moaned petulantly, slowly going from bouncing up and down to hopping back and forth between each foot. It was as unbearably shameful as it was strangely soothing. Before long her hands moved down between her legs as well, pressing on her bladder, as if that would relieve the pressure. She knew it wouldn't, but it still felt right. For a full minute she hopped around behind the counter, eyes glued to the entrance, hoping both that Marty would walk up any second now and also that he'd never show up to see this.

"Hurry your butt up jerkwad!" she screamed as the pressure continued to mount. She groaned and stopped her dance as soon as she saw a shape far too small to be Marty walking in. She was prepared to be terse from the get go, hoping to get this person out of here as fast as she could, but it was so much worse than she could have expected. It wasn't just any customer--It was that cat from before.

"Hello!" Eliza said cheerfully, skipping her way into the store, her little purse knocking into the clothing racks.

"How's your afternoon been miss?"

If you later asked Lenore what did it, she would have trouble explaining herself. Perhaps it was the constant sense of dread and embarrassment that had been swelling in strength all afternoon. Maybe it was the smug as hell grin the kid was wearing as she jumped up to the counter. Or it could have been that she really, really just needed to piss. Either way, she snapped.

"What are you doing here kid?" Lenore screeched, slamming her hands hard on the counter, her face a mask of anguish, "I told you to get the heck outta here! This is my job, mine mine mine mine!" Lenore did not seem to notice how high her tone had gotten, nor how childish she was speaking. Eliza continued to smile, and even more infuriatingly, seemed to be emboldened by Lenore's tantrum. Lenore's face was red as a tomato, and the entire mall probably heard her next scream.

"This is no place for babies!"

"Well what are you doing here then?"

No sound came out of Lenore besides a soft choking noise. Her arms were straight down at her side, ending in tight fists, while her glare was so sharp her eyes were practically closed. She shook like a leaf, frozen solid with fury behind the counter. When she finally gained enough control she lifted her hand high above her head, perhaps to smack Eliza, or throw something at her, or something. It didn't matter, because once her body was unfrozen that's when it began. That almost imperceptible sound of liquid impacting fabric. Lenore's body somehow only got tenser than before as she felt the stream hit the front of her skirt and fall down her legs. She tried to stop it, but she couldn't, and the stream of piss only got stronger as it continued to soak her undies. To say that her face was red a few seconds ago was almost an insult to how crimson her snout and ears were now. For a second she actually prayed; to who or what it didn't matter, only that someone could make her disappear on the spot and never return. But she didn't. She continued to stand behind the counter, pissing herself. It was so warm, sliding down her legs and into her boots. It made her want to cry, and when she sniffed she could smell the stale stench of her own incontinence.

Looking at Eliza's face, you'd think it was Christmas.

"Looks like *somebody*, needs a change," Eliza said with unbearable sense of self-satisfaction, "Don't worry, I'm prepared." Acting as if there was nothing strange about the situation in the slightest, she walked around to Lenore's side of the counter, pulling a pair of pull-ups from her purse.

"I... I... I," Lenore was having a very hard time speaking, "I'm not a baby." It was all she could muster, but Eliza clucked her tongue and shook her head.

"Babies pee their pants," Eliza said flatly.

"*Babies pee their pants*," Eliza's voice echoed inside of Lenore's head, with that same inescapable gravity.

"Now sit down so I can change you."

Lenore sat herself down upon the floor and laid back, her body on autopilot. Everything was happening so fast she couldn't parse it. Everything seemed so strange and scary. Why was all this happening to her? She winced as she felt the little girl pull off her soaked skirt and undies, burying her head in her hands. The cool breeze that blew between her legs made her shiver, and she found herself looking at the pull-ups with a sense of enthusiasm that disgusted her.

"Lift your legs," Eliza commanded, and Lenore obeyed. Every time she thought she couldn't get more embarrassed, things got worse, and now, with Eliza sliding the pull-ups down her legs, she was sure that she had finally hit rock bottom. When the dry plastic pants pushed snugly between her legs, she squeezed her hips, feeling them squish in between her thighs. She found herself thankful for the way it wicked the moisture away from her crotch, and how snugly it clung to her frame. Her hands moved down to push on the front, and as she did so, she rolled her hips in satisfaction. Now, she realized, unable and unwilling to stop her own shameful display, this was rock bottom.

"There! All done," Eliza said, standing back and surveying Lenore with her hands on her hips. She looked downright proud.

Lenore, on the other hand, looked miserable, now that the weird euphoria of getting daipered up wore off. There she sat, on the floor, in a slightly soggy pair of pull-ups, with her boots still laying in a puddle of her own urine. Every time she shifted, she felt the pull-ups squish

and sag around her hips. Her head was awash with so many anxieties and questions, but she felt less equipped to answer them than ever. With each passing second it got harder to even remember the questions. There was only one thing she was really sure of at that moment.

"I need a smoke."

Lenore reached around in her vest pocket for a moment and pulled out the pack. Fumbling for a cig, she fished one out, but right before she could put it in her mouth, it was snatched away.

"What do you think you're doing little lady?" Eliza said, wagging her finger in Lenore's direction, "Cigarettes aren't for you!"

"But I-"

"Babies don't smoke cigarettes. They're bad for little kids."

Lenore's fight had diminished entirely. She didn't even raise a finger back, she simply nodded, looking guilty. She was still so confused, but she knew the voice was right. It was the only thing she could be sure of, she now realized. With the voice's help, that is..

"I'm sowwy."

"Good," Eliza said, her face triumphant, "Here." She pulled a pacifier from her little purse, and jammed it into Lenore's mouth. Lenore's cheeks continued to burn, but she sucked nevertheless. Her shoulders slumped. It felt right. She hated it, but god it felt right.

"That's more appropriate for someone your age."

Lenore nodded, though she couldn't stand to meet Eliza's gaze. She hated when that little cat was right, and as far as the immaturing Lenore knew, that was all the time.

"Here, come with mommy on her smoke break," Eliza said, pulling on Lenore's hand, "We can't have you here in the store by yourself."

Lenore climbed to her feet, but not out of her stupor. Something felt right about following Eliza, even if what she said made no sense. She wasn't Lenore's mommy, right? She was bigger, more mature, but it was still weird for her to be taking charge. Wasn't it? Lenore wrestled with these questions as she followed Eliza into the back room, clutching her hand the whole time. The answers never came, but the questions left.

Five minutes later and the door burst open, smoke billowing out. There was Eliza, flicking the spent cig to the floor, while Lenore was still in tow. She looked like she was back to her surly self, but something was different. Like she wasn't simply clutching Eliza's hand because she needed to, but because she wanted to. Like a kid afraid of losing her mom at the mall.

"There's some toys in here for you to play with," Eliza said, handing her purse off to the once much older woman, "Go play in some corner of the store, and quietly. Mommy's gonna be busy working for awhile, okay?"

There was no voice this time. There didn't need to be. Lenore sure hated being treated like a kid, but she could no longer argue whether or not she was one. She snatched the purse away and snorted.

"Fine," she barked, sulking her ways towards a corner of the store filled with several stuffed animals. Eliza watched her and smiled.

"Be good for mama," Eliza called, stamping out the cigarette butt as she walked over to the counter. Sitting herself on a stool, she surveyed her territory like the ruthless queen that she was, while Lenore sat herself down onto the floor with a loud squish. She bounced a few times

after that, snickering at the feeling of the pull-ups puffing and squishing beneath her rump. Reluctantly, she took a doll out of Eliza's purse, and started setting up a tea party between it and the other plush toys nearby.

"Good? Pffft," Lenore muttered, shooting sideways glances at her mommy, "I'll show her good."

Lenore took in a deep breath and sighed. She looked pretty pleased with herself, as the front of her pull-ups yellowed, and the puddle began to form around her seat. Very pleased indeed. But what would you expect from such a brat?