

June 20, 2021: Irreplaceable

Whenever I travel, I have one rule: I never bring anything I'm not willing to lose, and for a while, that included a very special bear I called WooWoo Bear. Don't laugh; I named him when I was a baby, ok? Anyway, like I said I could never bring WooWoo Bear when I travel because I could never replace him. But this time is different because this trip is just for him.

What is a 29 year old guy doing taking a trip for his teddy, you ask? Well, it's a funny story. You see, five years ago, I actually decided to get rid of him. My parents told me they were having a huge garage sale and to get rid of any of my old things that I didn't want to keep, so I piled a bunch of my old video games and toys into the garage, and as an afterthought, I looked at my bed. I thought, *You really shouldn't be sleeping with a Teddy bear any more, Benjamin*. I mean I was 24, right? Old enough to sleep just fine without him. So I looked at him one last time, gave him one last hug, and then took him down to the garage.

"Alright buddy. I hope you make some other kid happy," I said, laying him down on top of my GI Joe Action Base set. Then, I left for work, figuring that by the time I was back he'd be gone. I thought it would be easier that way, at least, but it wasn't meant to be because when I got back home, he was waiting right there on my bed again.

"Uh, Mom?" I called, thinking that maybe they didn't sell anything. The garage had *looked* empty, but who knew. I walked downstairs and found my Mom in the living room reading one of her cozy cat mystery novels. "Mom, how well did the sale go?"

"Oh, it went great! We sold everything!"

"*Everything?*" I asked.

"Yeah, pretty much. Your video games sold like hotcakes. I was surprised you were willing to give them up. You used to *love* your games."

"Yeah, well. I guess I've just gotten too old for them."

My mom just raised her eyebrows and nodded. "Mm-hmm..."

I didn't really know what that meant, but I was tired so I just went back upstairs, brushed my teeth, and crawled into bed with Teddy.

"Well, old buddy. I guess you and I weren't meant to part yet. Sleep well."

And as I fell asleep, I could swear I heard a little voice in my head return the sentiment.

"Sleep well, Benji."

Neither Mom nor Dad ever said anything about it, but I just assumed they decided to save him themselves. Maybe they weren't quite ready to see their little boy grow up, or maybe it's because he was a gift from Dad when I was born. I don't know, but five years on, his age has really started showing. Not long ago, a little voice inside my head began nagging me, telling me it was time to look into restoring WooWoo Bear.

"Teddy bear restoration?" asked my boyfriend, Anthony, when I brought it up.

"Yeah! You know, like in that TV show, *The Minky Medic*, with Maria Kasanova and her hot assistant, John Flufferson?"

Andy looked at me like I was crazy. "Sorry, dude. You lost me. Why don't you just buy yourself a new one? Better yet, why are you even sleeping with a teddy in the first place? Teddy bears are for girls and *babies!*"

"Oh my gosh! Don't say that about WooWoo Bear," I said, covering his ears. Anthony just started laughing. "I'm *serious*, he's sensitive. And I'm pretty sure he already heard you. Apologize to WooWoo Bear right now. Or no sex."

"Okay, okay," Anthony said, still laughing. "Sorry WooWoo Bear! I hope you don't bust a seam over it!" Anthony was now rolling around on the bed and laughing. And so that's how he ended up being dragged along with me on this trip. It was that or risk no sex ever again for a million years.

We're in the airport now, waiting for a flight to Germany, where WooWoo Bear was made. He is a Zeiff bear, you see, made by the famous company teddy bear collectors know and love. I look at my round trip ticket to Berlin for the thousandth time. I'm so excited.

"Really? Germany?" my boyfriend asks for the millionth time.

"Yes, Germany. He is a Zeiff, after all!"

"Isn't there someone on EHarbor or Getsy or something that can fix him up?" I scoff, unable to believe my boyfriend just suggested that.

"I'm not just going to trust anyone with a Zeiff treasure like WooWoo Bear! Oh no, you must be tripping. You should just be happy we're getting to travel! Come on, it'll be fun."

"Yeah, right. The first thing I'm gonna do when I get there is get an *American* McBurger. You can go off and have Schnitzels and Bratwurst with your Teddy, weirdo." I laugh it off, but I have to admit I'm a little hurt as well. I can't believe Anthony is being such a stick in the mud, but then again, I guess I can't blame him. I mean I thought I was over my baby things myself, but somehow I've grown very attached to WooWoo Bear since he was mysteriously rescued from being sold.

Now we're boarding the plane and we find our seat by the windows. I take the aisle seat and immediately snuggle up with my teddy.

"Couldn't you at least put him in your luggage? This is embarrassing," Anthony says.

"Yeah right, and risk him getting damaged, or worse, *stolen*? Not on your life." Anthony just rolls his eyes and looks out the window.

"If anyone asks, we've never met."

I punch Anthony in the arm playfully, and snuggle back up with WooWoo Bear. I don't really care how it looks, I just have to have him. As soon as we are in the air, the waitresses come by with the drink carts. I drink my tomato juice and I'm out like a light, slipping my thumb into my mouth as I hug WooWoo Bear in a death grip of ultimate security. As I fall asleep, I could swear I hear that small voice in my head again.

"That's it Benji. Don't let that meanie tell you what to do. We're *best* pals. All you need is me and your thumb. You'll see. When we get me fixed up, you'll be just like new too!" I hear a little high pitched giggle following this little diatribe, but I figure it's just the beginning of my dream as I slip into a restful sleep.

"Do you want a baby carrier for that Bear?" asks Anthony, as we walk around the beautiful Europa center. It seems like a great idea to me but I can tell he's being sarcastic.

"You're the one who wanted to immediately go shopping," I say, rolling my eyes as I give WooWoo bear a comforting hug. "This is the third shopping center we've been to, and we haven't even gone three thousand meters!"

"Okay, okay," he says, "We'll go to the Zeiff store. Where is it again?"

"Like, a ten minute walk up the Kurfürstendamm."

"What did you call me?"

"Knock it off, you goof," I say, punching his arm. "You should at least learn the street names while you're here."

"Whatever," he says, holding up his shopping bags. "I've got what I wanted. Now all I need is a McBurger's Heartstopper and I'll be happy."

"Charming," I say, rolling my eyes again. "You clearly are a man of culture."

Ten minutes later, I finally catch sight of the oversized stuffed bear that graces the entrance of the Zeiff store.

"Are we there yet?" asks Anthony, his arms hanging by his sides as he carries his bags full of shopping. "My arms are about to fall off!"

"Yes, right here," I say. I have refused to help Anthony carrying any of his stuff as I'm pretty sure it's the only thing that stops him from buying *more* stuff. When we walk inside, he practically collapses on the floor, but I'm too in awe to care. I look around to see that on every shelf and table there is row upon row of fluffy friends. I hold up my teddy so he can get a good look too.

"Look, WooWoo Bear! Look how many brothers and sisters you have!"

"Sir, can I help you?" asks a concerned attendant in a button-up uniform as my fallen boyfriend struggles to right himself.

"He's fine," I say. "He's just being dramatic. Anthony, stop embarrassing us."

Anthony sits up, and huffs. "You're the one carrying that *bear* around everywhere," he says, muttering to himself.

"Oh! A *vintage* bear!" says the attendant, looking delighted as he notices the bear in my hands. "May I see?"

"Holy moly! Look at these prices!" says Anthony loudly enough to make people turn their heads.

"You can't put a price on quality," I call over to him. "You're talking about one of the finest bears money can buy." Anthony backs away from the display slowly, as if he is in a fine China shop and afraid of breaking something.

"Yes," says the attendant. "Zeiff is all about quality. Oh, it's such a treat to see an old friend return. Yes, I think he was sold at this store, too. A very rare one, this. Part of our eternal youth line."

"But he's not looking too young right now, I'm afraid," I say, taking him back and looking at his threadbare muzzle. "He's getting older, just like me."

"You'd be surprised what a little restoration work can do," says the attendant with a wink.

"That's why I came all the way from the U.S.A. I want to bring back his youth, in a manner of speaking."

The attendant smiles. "You flew all the way here for that, hmm? He must really be special. Although most people would have shipped their bear."

"Oh, no. *This* bear never leaves my sight. I had to bring him here and I had to come with. He told me himself."

The attendant gives me a knowing look. "Well, you've come to the right place. We offer a repair service for all our fuzzy friends. Only... we don't do the repairs here. We send them off to the Zeiff workshop in Giengen an der Brenz."

"Oh no," I say. "That won't do at all. Is there... I mean do they... Listen, I know this is a strange request, but do you think if I take him there, they'll let me watch as he is repaired?"

The attendant thinks for a second. "Believe it or not, you aren't the first one to ask this. In fact, strangely enough, owners of this particular model have been showing up recently for repairs. I suppose it *has* been about 30 years since they were in circulation..." The attendant muses for a while and finally takes me to the counter and writes down a number for me to call.

"You can call here and arrange for your friend to be repaired. I hope you can change your hotel reservations because it's a bit of a drive."

"Pack your bags, Anthony, we're going to Giengen!" I call.

"Are you serious?" he says looking away from a display of adorable woodland creatures. Without bothering to reply, I grab him by the collar and drag him along. "Hurry up, or no McBurgers for you!"

"Hold on!" says the attendant, before we leave. Anthony and I stop and look at each other. "I saw you eyeing that stuffed badger," he says to Anthony. "Don't be shy about it."

"Oh, *ho!*" I say, crossing my arms and smirking at Anthony with a satisfied grin. "Sounds like *somebody* wants a plushieeeee."

Anthony blushes. "Whatever... He's... cute, okay? And... I don't know..."

"Come on, Anthony," I say, grinning. "Spit it out. And what?"

"It's gonna sound weird but he kinda... *speaks* to me, ya know?" I know exactly what he means. "But I could never afford that..."

I look down at the loads of shopping bags he's carrying then back to him in disbelief.

"Come on, really? And how much did you spend so far?"

Even the shop attendant can't suppress a grin at Anthony's obvious bashfulness about wanting a plush toy of his own.

"It's perfectly all right," the attendant says. "Our fluffy friends are to be enjoyed by people of *all* ages."

"Yeah, but..." he begins. He's fidgeting with his hands and looking like a bashful little boy who got caught with his hands in the cookie jar.

"No buts," I say, picking up the badger and pulling out my wallet. "This one's on me."

Anthony is sitting across from me on the train to Giengen. He is holding his new stuffed badger in his lap and his expression is one of mixed embarrassment and happiness as he hugs his new best friend. Carrying him around out in the open was a condition for me buying the little guy, though I don't see Anthony complaining. Of course, I don't pass over the opportunity to give him a hard time about it as well.

"See? I knew you'd come around. You were giving me such a hard time and now look, your stuffie is almost *twice* as big as mine!" The badger *is* quite large and fluffy, at 25 inches or 63 cm compared to my teddy who is only 15 inches or 38 centimeters.

Anthony turns bright red and shoots back, "W-well you're the one who decided to buy him! And I'm only holding him here because I didn't have any room in my bags."

"And because I insisted," I add.

"I... I never had a plushie of my own before," he admits, after a moment. "My parents never let me have one... said it was for *babies*."

"And see, don't you feel so much better with your little buddy in your lap where you can cuddle him to your heart's content?" He gets a flustered look on his face and changes the subject.

"I don't know how you talked me into getting on a train to nowhere at 6 in the morning!"

"Giengen is a lovely town, you'll see. Maybe you and Mr. Badger can explore it together!"

"His name is Toots," he mumbles. I smile. This is too cute.

"Right," I say, patting his knee. "Toots. Like a train whistle! That's a very good name for your special friend. Right WooWoo bear?" I turn to look my teddy in the eyes, then look back up at my bashful boyfriend. "WooWoo bear agrees."

"Oh, stuff it. Both of you," he says, rolling his eyes and holding his badger closer as he looks out the window. I look down at the Zeiff tickets in my hand. It's been a hassle arranging a hotel and travel to a whole different part of Germany, but this journey has to happen, no matter the cost. I can sense it. Even Anthony can't deny that pull. He says he thought he could hear Toots whispering in his ear last night as he drifted off to sleep, telling him how much fun they would have in Giengen at the Zeiff workshop.

We step off the train and we have a short taxi ride to our hotel. Anthony and I each spend the ride with our plushies tucked under one arm as we hold hands. As soon as we walk into the hotel, they know exactly why we're there.

"Ah, Zeiff enthusiasts! Welcome! I hope you enjoy your stay," says the concierge. "You are very lucky. It looks like you have been upgraded to the fairy tale suite!"

"Wow, did you hear that, Anthony? We got an upgrade!"

"That's pretty cool, actually," says Anthony, clearly enjoying the VIP treatment. "Hold on... It's not going to cost extra, is it?"

"Not at all!" chuckles the concierge. "I hope you find it to your liking. If you need any extra accommodations - bigger trash cans, toiletries... changing supplies... we're happy to accommodate!" The gentleman adds with a wink.

"What is he talking about?" asks Anthony, whispering to me. I just shrug and thank the concierge. The bellhop takes us and our bags to our room, a very nice suite with a whimsical childlike feel, with plushies everywhere and walls painted in storybook fashion, but we spend little time appreciating our new room. Really, we're in there just long enough to drop off our bags and then we're off.

"Anthony, do you have butterflies in your stomach?" I ask, as we begin the walk to the Zeiff museum and workshop.

"Yes, I do. I don't know why. I don't even *care* about this stupid Zeiff workshop." Anthony suddenly gets a stricken, guilty look as he stares at his badger. "S-sorry, Toots. I didn't mean it *that* way. I was just... It's embarrassing, okay?"

"Just give him a hug and I'm sure he'll forgive you." I say, suppressing a smirk. Anthony rolls his eyes at my trite suggestion, but still, he furtively hugs his badger buddy and whispers something into his ear. I can't help but chuckle at the cuteness.

Our anticipation only mounts as we approach the Zeiff complex. It's just past noon and already there is a line. We are far from the only ones with our plushies, though of those, we are certainly older than most.

"Aww man," says Anthony. We have to wait in this long ass line..."

"Not exactly," I say, puffing out my chest. "I happened to call ahead and make an appointment after our visit to the shop yesterday. That means we can enter the VIP line." I lead Anthony to the front of the line where a velvet rope blocks off an empty area for a smaller line.

"This is more like it," says Anthony, visibly growing more confident as I show the line guard our tickets on my smartphone. We are let in and wind our way to the front of the little line area. And it feels much deserved, not because Anthony or I are VIPs, no. Our stuffies are the true VIPs here. *Very important plushies.*

"Let's see," says the doorman who checks our passes at the entrance. "Anthony and Benjamin, hmm? Oh, yes, we've heard about *you* two. You'll come with me right away."

"R-really?" I ask, looking between the man and my boyfriend. What could they have possibly heard besides the fact that I've scheduled a restoration?"

"Come along," the man says, when he sees my hesitation. "We don't have all day. And I have a big surprise for you in particular, Benji."

Benji? How did he know my childhood name? That wasn't in the request form. Something is off, but that inner voice urges me forward, and I obey. Anthony seems oblivious to this tension, until he too has a shock.

"Come along little Andy. You too. You've finally got a fuzzy friend, and you won't want to be left out."

"How did he know?" asks Anthony, with a bewildered expression on his face. Then he comes along as well.

So here we are, my boyfriend and I and our two plushies, walking right into the Zeiff Museum and Workshop like honored guests. The design is modern, with animals from all the Zeiff collections in exciting dynamic displays that could make one imagine they were really alive in their respective environments. There are jungle scenes. Forest scenes, whimsical storybook scenes. It's a shame that I can't linger to look at all the

wonderful displays of plushies, but the call inside of me and the brisk pace of the no-nonsense attendant urge me forward.

The feeling of butterflies in my stomach only grows stronger as we go further into the building and I know Andy feels it too because he's holding his new badger buddy Toots very close as we venture deeper. The attendant opens a tall metal door to the side of the tour walk and stands aside.

"In here to the workshop. Your surprise is this way." Andy and I look at each other. The two of us will actually get to see how these lovable critters are made. How cool is that?

Sure enough, we are led into the workshop where hundreds of teddies and other critters are made every week. The two of us gasp and look in awe as we see that, instead of an assembly line process, each creation is hand made by artisans with the utmost attention to detail. The attendant mentions that they also put their signature inside the seam of each item, though the customer never sees it. That's how they will verify my bear's maker.

The man holds his hand out and I hand him my bear. Carefully, he pulls at the seam and looks with an eyepiece to see the signature inside.

"And now for your surprise, he says, as he hands my bear back to me. You may be surprised to learn that the maker of your bear is still here after 30 years, and ready to restore your bear. You are very lucky about that, or you might have missed your chance!"

"Yes, my chance," I say, assuming he means my chance to get the bear repaired. "I'm so lucky, right WooWoo bear?" I look at my bear and give him a kiss on the piece of cloth that has served as a nose since I chewed off the original one as a baby. An old woman with a grandmotherly smile regards me from a workbench as she turns to look at me and WooWoo Bear.

"Hello. Oh! It's you!" she says, reaching out for my teddy whom she holds at arm's length as she smiles at him. "So you've returned, hmm? And you've brought your person, I see, along with some extra company. *Hello* everyone!"

We both shake her hand and introduce ourselves. I'm completely charmed by how she talks to WooWoo bear.

"My name is Margaret. But you can call me Granny Greta," she says. "I've been expecting this one to come back sooner or later," she says, sitting the bear on her knee. "Not everyone makes it back, of course, but he's a tenacious one."

I nod. Of course she's right. My teddy has quite the personality. I smile and giggle as she continues talking to the teddy like he's alive. Just like I do!

"Oh please, do make yourselves comfortable," she says, and Andy and I sit down as we notice two chairs waiting for us. The attendant excuses himself and Margarete gets right to work talking about how my Teddy will be restored, and how much younger he'll feel once he's done.

"Just like new, in fact!" she says, with a glint in her eye. "You too!" she says to me, leaving me somewhat perplexed. How is this going to affect *me*? I'm not the one being repaired. Then she turns to my boyfriend Andy. "Of course *you* won't need any restoration work on *your* new friend, will you?" she asks. He shakes his head, blushing and holding Toots close.

"I know you probably want to stay and watch, so get comfortable. Oh, if either of you have to go potty, now is a good time, while you're able."

While I'm *able*? The moment she says that, I immediately feel like I am going to pee my pants. Andy seems to have the same realization and asks where the potty is in a panicked voice.

"Right that way," she points. "You can leave your stuffed friends with me while you go. I'm sure they'll be fine."

We rush toward the restroom and Granny Greta calls after us. "Don't forget to wash your hands, little ones!"

Washing my hands is the furthest thing from my mind as we rush to avoid wetting our pants. Unfortunately, accidents can happen, and I already have the feeling that one of us isn't going to make it.

Sure enough, when we reach the bathroom Anthony and I realize there's only space for one in there, and neither of us can wait.

"Get outta my way, Ben!"

"No way, Andy! I'm not peeing my pants in the middle of the teddy bear workshop!"

"Too bad!" he says, pushing me away as he squeezes into the bathroom and leaves me banging on the door. The moment I hear the sound of pee hitting the toilet bowl, and Anthony's satisfied sigh on the other end, my body decides to let go as well, and I feel warmth trickle into my pants. I'm still banging on the door and crying, sinking down to the ground on my knees as Anthony washes up his hands and begins to whistle.

"You made me have a accident in my pants!" I wail, as he opens the door and looks down at me in surprise.

"The bathroom's free..." he says, quietly.

"What use is *that*?" I yell. "I can't use it *now*! It all went in my pants!"

Anthony shrugs and then we hear a voice from nearby.

"What's all this racket?" It's the security guard who let us in the VIP line. The moment he sees me his eyebrows raise. "Oh, ho! What's this? A little one out here on his own? And in wet pants? That just won't do."

"He's not on his own," says Anthony, as the man approaches, shaking his head. "He's with me!"

"Oh! Well, sir. My mistake. It looks like *one* of you is old enough to make it to the potty."

"Heyyyy," I say, through sniffling sobs. "Don't be mean!"

"Oh, I'm very sorry, little boy. I didn't mean to be. I'm just stating facts. I don't know what your big brother was doing leaving you in big boy pants, but come along. We'll get you sorted right away."

"W-where are you taking me? Andy?" I look back at my boyfriend who shrugs his arms and gives me a look like, "What do you want me to do about it?" as the security guard tells him to go ahead and rejoin his furry companions.

"We'll just be a moment," he says, and Anthony seems completely fine letting someone else take care of the mess.

I keep crying as I am led away. I don't know what kind of trouble I am in, but I am sure it isn't good. Am I going to be kicked out? Have I broken some German law about peeing in public? I'm scared as well as humiliated.

"There, there, little one. It will all be all right," The man says, rubbing my back as I'm led into a room with a picture of a teddy bear bent over a baby. "Into the diaper changing station with you."

"What?! The diaper changing stati-" My eyes go wide, but before I can even finish my sentence he pushes me through the door. The last thing I see before the door swings shut is the happy old security guard waving bye-bye.

I land on my soggy butt and immediately two soft and fuzzy arms lift me up by the armpits.

"Oh! Thanks, I- Eek!" I shriek in shock as I realize that the arms belong to an oversized teddy bear. The teddy is wearing an old-fashioned white and red nurse's cap and looks down at me with a smile, still holding me in its paws. "H-h-how are you-

"Such a fussy little one. And no wonder. You're all wet! We'll get you sorted out right away."

I can't even speak. What I'm seeing makes no sense at all. Is it animatronic? Some kind of costume?

"But of course it makes sense, silly," the teddy bear says, lifting me up and laying me on the hard changing table. My wet pants squelch slightly as my butt hits the firm surface. "You know that teddy bears are alive. You know because you talk with yours all the time, don't you?"

"Wait. How can you...?"

"Hear what you're thinking? Well, that's just our special gift. So we always know what our little ones are thinking and feeling. I know you're feeling scared right now, but you'll feel much better when we get you in a nice dry diaper, I guarantee it! Pretty soon, your best babyhood friend will be restored and you'll look as good as new too!"

"What does that mea- whoa!" I yell, as my legs are pulled out from under me by one swift tug of my pants, leaving me flat on my back in my wet undies and t-shirt.

"You'll see," the teddy says, holding up my pants. "Ah- ah- ah-," it chides as I try to get up and grab them back. "Back down, little one. Don't make this hard on yourself."

"But I don't wear diapers..." I practically whine, as the teddy disposes of my pants and fluffs up a comically big diaper to put around my waist. I try to wiggle off the table but Nurse Teddy must have sent out some sort of psychic stuffie message because more bears show up to hold me down and take off my soggy undies. These ones are regular-sized and yet somehow I can't get away from them.

"A-aren't you all filled with fluff? You shouldn't be able to-mmmf." My eyes go wide as a thick rubber bulb is forced between my lips, filling my mouth and silencing me.

"Hush now, little one," says Nurse Teddy, smiling and bringing down the diaper toward the changing table. I just got undressed and pacified by cute little teddy bears. How embarrassing is that? Then the plastic of the diaper comes to rest against my butt and my heart starts beating wildly.

"Up goes the baby bum," says the bear, lifting my ankles. "Down goes the baby bum." The other teddies giggle and make silly faces, trying to make me smile and laugh as I'm lowered onto the crinkly garment. The humiliating thing is, it kind of works. The four tapes are quickly secured and I'm now officially, undeniably, diapered.

"Awww! See? You feel better already," says Nurse Teddy, smiling down at me.

I don't want to admit it, but it's true, even if I'm completely ashamed of myself.

"Okay, little guy. Down you go. Now run along to Granny." I look wide-eyed at the bear, then down at myself, then back at the bear. I can't speak with the paci in my mouth so I gesticulate wildly that I can't go out there without pants. Nurse Teddy, however, has no sympathy, it simply walks me out the door with its massive body and closes the door behind me.

I look around nervously, not knowing what I'll say if someone runs across me. "Help! Teddy bears are putting me in diapers!" doesn't seem like the wisest thing to admit to other people. I bang on the changing station door and try to open it one more time, but it won't budge. I'm stuck. Perhaps the best thing to do is just to go back to Granny Greta as fast as possible.

I look down at my bare legs poking out of my thick diaper like two popsicle sticks, then I do a double take.

"Where is all my hair?"

That's what I *would* say if my mouth wasn't completely plugged by this darn pacifier. The pacifier won't even pull out when I tug on it. It's just too big, collapsing in my mouth to fill it perfectly but expanding whenever I pull on it. What the hell kind of pacifier is this?

I quickly hurry back to where Granny Greta, Anthony, and our plushies are waiting. I look at them with teary eyes as I get there. Anthony looks astonished to see me in my current state but Granny doesn't seem surprised at all. She just smiles and nods.

"*There* you are, little one. You really shouldn't wander off like that. We'll have to assign you a minder. In the meantime, I've brushed your bear. His fur is like new! Back to how it was when you were a baby."

I look down at my own missing 'fur' and back up. "Don't worry, sweetie. We'll have him back to new in no time. Bring him back tomorrow for the next repair. Tomorrow the *real* restoration work begins." Granny hands me the newly fluffed teddy.

"Wait! Can't I at least have some pants?" I try to ask, but Anthony is pulling me away.

"Let's get out of here," he says. "While we still can."

There's nothing I can say about it with that binky in my mouth. I'm forced to just waddle out of the workshop past groups of giggling students, tourists, you name it. An overgrown toddler clutching my teddy and sucking my binky, clad in my bright blue shirt and a thick white diaper.

"Ah, gentlemen, I see you have returned. Feeling restored, are we?" The Concierge seems less than surprised to see me waddling into the hotel in a T-shirt and diaper, hand-in-hand with my boyfriend as each of us hold our big plushies with our free hands.

"Well, I'm sure you two will want to freshen up upstairs. Plenty of supplies for your, *ahem* special circumstances. Ring us up if you need any help, though I'm sure your fuzzy friends will have you handled."

"Fuzzy friends?" asks Andy, looking at me quizzically. "I know they're cute, but isn't he taking this joke a little too far?"

I look back at him and shrug my shoulders. There's no way I'll be able to talk with this huge binky in my mouth and besides he wouldn't believe me if I told him.

When we finally get upstairs after a long and uncomfortable elevator ride with the other guests gawking and giggling, I'm relieved to be in the safety of our own room where no one can make fun of me. I plop down on the bed and Andy immediately pulls the binky out of my mouth and says, "Let's get rid of this ridiculous thing. What the hell happened with that security guard?"

"You would never believe me," I say. "Hey, what are you doing?"

"Just checking your diaper," He says with a grin as he squeezes the front of it.

"Unh... seriously, dude? I don't n-need it." I moan as the feel of him playing with the front of the diaper makes me start to get excited despite myself.

"You sure about that buddy? Because you feel pretty wet to me!" He says, raising his eyebrows.

"Stawwwwwp," I say, pushing him away and giggling.

"No, seriously, you are. *Look*," he says, and my laughter dies away as I look down to see what he's talking about.

"Heheh, ha, no way.... Wait... *what the fuck?!*"

"Ah ah ah, you shouldn't use naughty words," says a high pitched voice from behind me. Anthony immediately whips his head to the left to stare at the source. Good. That means I'm not crazy, because I'm not the only one seeing my newly fluffy teddy right himself and look my way. I can feel myself wetting more just from the shock of seeing the impossible, and for once I don't do anything to stop it.

"Y-y-y-y-you *can't* be," says Anthony, covering his mouth and trembling. Oh but he can. The moment WooWoo bear speaks I know it's him, even though I've never heard his voice out loud, I knew it well. This is the voice that had spoken to me as a child in memories that I later chalked up to an overactive imagination. The voice that whispered to me in my sleep as an adult and coaxed me here to restore him. "You're a stuffed bear. You can't talk!"

"Of course he can," comes another high-pitched, albeit gruffer voice, and the badger that is still being hugged against Andy's body with his free arm looks up at him. Andy screams and drops the badger, who lands on the floor, bouncing and giggling. "Oof! Heehee. Good thing I'm made of fluff!"

"Now does *somebody* need a diapee change?" asks WooWoo bear.

"I think *so*," says Toots Badger, toddling up to the bed on his stubby little legs. He looks up at Andy. "Give me a lift will ya?"

Andy reluctantly does as he's told, his hands trembling as he reaches out to pick up Toots. "S-sure, here ya go."

"What are you *doing*?" I ask my boyfriend. "Are you actually *helping* them?" Anthony touches his fingers together, looking guilty.

"Well, I mean... they *are* right. You *do* need a change." I scoff at my boyfriend as the two plushies close in on me.

"What?" he says. "You don't expect *me* to change you, do you?"

"I don't expect *anyone* to change me," I say, "I don't need diapers!!!"

I yelp as the two plushies try to take a hold of me. I try to jump off the bed, but then I see more plushies stirring. The whimsical childlike feel of our suite is suddenly feeling a lot more threatening as all the cute creatures that I thought were decoration

jump down from toy castles and tea cabinets to come help their brethren diaper the fussy baby.

"We should diaper little Andy too," says WooWoo Bear. "No point in letting Benji have all the fun!"

"Yes, it's much more fun to have *two* babies."

"N-n-no," says Andy, looking around in a panic. "I'll do whatever you say, just don't baby me!"

"Well... Can you help diaper up little Benji while I use the phone?" asks WooWoo Bear. I look at Andy with a pleading look in my eyes.

I whine As Anthony lays me down on the changing table. Yet another red flag we had missed in our rush to get to the Zeiff workshop this morning.

"But I don't need diapers!"

"I don't care," he says. "It's what Toots Badger wants me to do, so I'm going to do it." I sob as Anthony changes my sopping wet diaper only to replace it with another even thicker diaper as Toots and the other plushies look on in approval. All the while, WooWoo Bear is on the phone with room service ordering goodness knows what for our room.

"Looks like your arm and leg hair aren't the only thing that's back to how it was when you were a baby," says Toots. He's right. I look in horror as I see that there's not a hair to be seen between my legs. That restoration really *did* have an effect - and not just on WooWoo Bear. My teddy got all his fur back fluffy and new, and mine disappeared!

I fuss and fight as they dress me up in an adorable little German baby outfit complete with a baby harness and something they call 'spreizhose', or 'spreader pants' which will force my legs so far apart I'll have to crawl everywhere. My fussing does me no good as I know Andy is stronger than me even without the plushies on his side. Together, Andy and the plushies wrestle me into the outfit. Then, they lead me over to the mirror to show me what a great big baby I've become. Even I have to admit I look pretty cute.

"Isn't it great?" says Toots. "Oh, we're all going to have so much fun at playtime." He gasps. "Ooh! We can have a tea party!"

The plushies all start cheering. They sit us down at a tea table and begin setting us up for a deluxe tea party with a play tea set and play-clay tea cakes. Andy and I look around at the commotion like the world has gone mad, which it has.

Then there's a knock and I look over to the door.

"Come in!" calls WooWoo Bear and my face turns bright red as a small army of servers and staff show up carting in more furniture, food, and equipment while I sit there on the carpet in my big baby outfit, crinkling with every movement as I'm forced to play tea party with my boyfriend and our fluffy companions.

"Aww, isn't that cute?" says the first hotel employee who spots me. There's nowhere to hide as the other employees begin cooing and smiling.

I try to call out for help but get a mouthful of tea when I open my mouth, and a giggling bear. I sputter and shoot the naughty creature a look, but they just tease me. "Aww! The baby is firsty? Are you gonna open up your mouth for more tea?"

I realize that the plushies are just going to stuff my mouth if I try to speak up, so I'm forced to sit there, humiliated in my spreader pants as the employees attend to WooWoo bear's demands.

"More diapers, please!" says WooWoo bear in his high pitched voice. "Yes, changing supplies can go right there. Oh, you can take away their bags, it's full of icky big boy stuff. They don't need that! Oh, yes, a play carpet would be perfect right here! Can we get a playpen and some child gates to make sure the little ones don't wander off?"

The room quickly comes to resemble a nursery or little kid's room rather than a themed hotel room. Even the bed is replaced by a big oversized crib.

"But where will I sleep?" asks Andy, his face smeared with fake tea cakes as the bed is taken away.

"Aww, the two baby boyfriends will look adorable in their crib, don't you think?" asks WooWoo bear, ignoring the horrified expression of me and my boyfriend.

"Yes, sir!" says the nearest porter. *Sir?* I realize that the respect - damn near reverence - paid to our stuffed animals did not end at the Zeiff gates. No, this whole town seemed to treat them as VIPs - very important plushies!

"Ah, here they are!" says WooWoo Bear as the porters bring in a dusty old bag of pull-ups and sets them beside a positive wall of diapers that had taken shape on the far wall by the changing table.

"Sorry, we had to go digging in the storage room for these. Not too many guests end up wearing them."

"W-who are those for?" Asks Anthony.

“Who do you think?” Asks WooWoo bear with a smirk. Anthony yelps as he’s pushed down onto his back and his pants and undies are pulled off. He’s now naked below the waist and blushing furiously but he can do nothing to fend off the pack of plushies that hold him down. A small white and purple unicorn sits on his chest and smiles at him as two teddies pull up the thick crinkly pull-up over his legs all the way up to his waist. He looks down in horror when they let him up, like he can’t believe he’s really wearing them.

“Much better,” says the concierge, who has come to personally see to it that his guests are well accommodated and happy with their new ‘arrangements’.

By the time all the staff leave us to our fate, the room has all the trappings of a nursery with enough diapers to last me a lifetime and enough security measures to ensure we never end up wandering off on our own. When the plushies finish feeding us our tea, they herd us along to the crib.

“I gotta go pee,” whines Anthony, who is doing the potty dance after all the tea they poured down our throats.

“Well,” says WooWoo bear, pointing to a big blue potty chair in the corner, “You’d better hurry. Once you’re in the crib, you won’t be allowed out until naptime is over.”

“I can’t pee there!” he cries, blushing harder than ever. At least he *has* that option. I’m already wet and a teddy checks my diaper, declaring it should last through naptime, much to my embarrassment.

“Okay, then,” says WooWoo bear. Into the crib you go!”

“No! Wait!” My boyfriend says. “I- ...I’ll do it.” He glumly marches over to the potty chair and has to wait while a hippo and gorilla plush pull down his ‘big kid undies’, then he must listen to their instructions as they force him to go through the steps of going to the potty one by one.

“Okay little Andy, now sit down on the seat. Good boy! Go ahead and go tinkles. Don’t you have to go? You have thirty seconds and then we’ll check how much you made!”

Andy is red-faced and straining. “I c-can’t!” he says. I can hear the panic in his voice. At the last minute he manages to force out a stream of urine. The hollow plastic of the potty makes it obvious as the stream of urine drums against it. With a final squirt, it stops and all the plushies applaud like he’s accomplished some great feat.

“There we go!” says Toots badger. I’m so proud of my big buddy!

Anthony's face twists up in a mix of pride and embarrassment as he's stood up, his peepee given a couple shakes by the gorilla, and his pull-ups are pulled back up for him. Soon he joins me in the crib and the two of us are pacified and put down for our naps.

We are totally exhausted by this ordeal and end up falling asleep fairly quickly as a lullaby plays out of a mobile spinning above our heads.

We are woken up by the feeling of soft paws pushing on our shoulders, and soft voices saying,

"Benji... Andy... Time to get up..."

At first I don't know where I am.

"Ugh... Anthony," I mumble. "I've just been having the strangest dream that our plushies turned us into big babies... Andy?" I turn and jump to see that Andy is sucking on a pacifier which is strapped around his mouth and he's staring at me desperately.

"Little Andy was making too much noise asking to be let out to use the potty so he got the hush hush paci," giggles Toots the Badger in his gruff way. I can see that Anthony is desperately holding onto the front of his pull-up, hoping for any strength to hold back a torrent of urine. As soon as the side of the crib is let down and he's let out, he makes a run for the potty, but his badger's paw stops him in his tracks.

"Now, now. NO running, little boy. Come with your badger buddy. I'll help you get sorted." Andy is practically crying now from the pain of trying to hold it in. Once again Anthony is led through the humiliating process of being helped onto the potty chair and told how to use it, then getting heaps of praise from the badger. The badger stands him up, pulls the pull-up up most of the way, then pulls it out to inspect the front. He shakes his head and tsks.

"Hmmm, a few dribbles in there, little guy. Looks like you came very close to having an accident. I'm afraid you're still learning, but not so bad that you need diapers quite yet."

"What about me?" I whine, looking at WooWoo bear, who just chuckles and waves his paw dismissively.

"Not a chance. Do you even *have* to go potty?" I shake my head when I realize that I don't.

"Well, then let's check you and see how soggy you are, then..." The bear reaches to the hole in the middle of my spreader pants with the help of a few plushie pals holding me down, and opens up my onesie snaps to reveal an absolutely soaked diaper. "There, you see? You *really* need these, little boy. It's a good thing we have plenty more diapers where that one came from."

I'm changed on the changing table with much fuss and protest, but what they say next really shocks me.

"Time for din dins! Let's take you two out on the town. We'll get Andy's favorite: McBurger's!" Andy and I look at each other and gulp. This is not how we want to be seen.... By *anyone*.

With a lot of coaxing and pleading, I am at least allowed out of my spreader pants, though the baby harness and the humiliating baby outfit remain. I look like an advertisement for Oktoberfest but with the most ridiculously babyish flair added to the traditional german outfit - like leather pants that are so small that they only serve as a diaper cover, with two buttons on the front coming up over the thick bulge so I can be checked easily by any of our furry caretakers. WooWoo bear chides me when I complain.

"I can't go out like this, WooWoo Bear! Be reasonable!"

"You're a baby, Benji. Of *course* you can go out dressed like this. In fact, you have to dress your age at *all* times, so no thinking you're going to get your old clothes back, little mister!"

Andy is luckier - he at least gets to wear overalls. Sure, they're bright red and there's a picture of a smiling badger on the front, but it could at least be plausible that he just has a quirky fashion sense, and his pull-up doesn't really show under the thick denim fabric. Not like mine which is a glorified diaper cover with suspender straps attached. He's allowed to go without a harness if he agrees to hold onto my reins and 'keep me out of trouble'. We are made to hold hands and carry our plushies with us under our other arms as we waddle out to the elevator and down to the lobby.

In the lobby, the staff makes a big fuss over us and we are blushing red.

"Ohhh! Aren't they just precious?"

"What good little ones they are, carrying their plushies!"

"Be good for your plushies while you're out!"

The attention is positive, but embarrassing. When we get out into the town, however, prodded along by our plush companions, we find it is another matter.

We get strange looks as we walk down the street, while others find it amusing and pull out their phones to record the silly babies with their plushies. When we enter the McBurger's, all heck breaks loose as we are teased and laughed at for our ridiculous baby outfits. We look so over the top, it's clownish and the cashiers insist that we can only have the kiddo meals from the menu.

We are forced to sit in our high chairs and eat our chicken nuggies with our hands as people giggle, gawk, and coo at us. Of course, the plushies don't move, so it looks like we're all doing it on our own, but it's really them pulling the strings. And of course, Andy is holding the reins, so to speak. Every time I try to pull away or get out of the situation, he gives my reins a tug and tells me to behave. I'm beginning to resent my flunkie boyfriend.

Finally, we are presented with two huge bottles of apple juice, and made to drink them down and then a refill. I just know that I'm going to wet my diaper like crazy, and Andy looks nervous about his pull-ups. We are only too grateful when we finish our meal and are finally able to waddle out the door hand in hand. I can feel the warmth in the front of my diaper already as it swells up and squelches and squishes with every step, while Andy is once again doing the potty dance, told by the McBurger's employees that little ones aren't allowed in the potty without an adult present.

We hurry back to the hotel as fast as our little legs can carry us and spend the rest of the night there. Luckily Andy doesn't have an accident in his pants, just more dribbles which means more pull-ups.

"Keep it together Andy... who knows what will happen to us if we *both* end up as babies..." I say. Andy nods solemnly, but I can see the doubt in his eyes. Especially when we are forced to drink more bottles before bedtime.

"Can't I at least get a sippy cup?" asks Andy.

"Nah, bottles are more fun," says Toots. And that's when I realize it. We've played with toys all our lives and haven't questioned it. Well, now... the toys are playing with us.

The next morning, we are awoken bright and early. Andy has wet his pull-up and he's completely distraught.

"There, there, Andy," says Toots the badger. "Lots of little boys wet the bed."

"D-d-does this mean I have to go back to *diapers*?" He asks, through sobs.

"No, no, it just means you'll need to wear them to bed. And naps. And probably car trips and train trips too."

"T-that's not so bad... I guess," he says sniffing and eyeing me, who is in a soaked and messy diaper and didn't even wake up to do it.

"No, it's not bad at all," says WooWoo Bear. "Let's get you two dressed up for the Zeiff workshop."

The two of us are dressed up again. Andy looks proud to be allowed to step into a pull-up held up by two teddy bears while I'm changed on the changing table by that gorilla and his unicorn minion.

"It's not fair!" I say, pouting as I feel the thick plastic-lined padding hug my butt, lifting me a good inch off the changing table and pressing my legs apart with its cool, crinkly bulk. Of course, the outfit I wear does nothing to hide the diaper - just a tiny pair of shorts with suspenders and a too-short t-shirt that says baby brother. I look like a complete dork, and my boyfriend gets a matching outfit that says big brother. I blush as I look down and see that the top of my diaper sticks out several inches above my shorts. Wherever I go, people are going to see it.

The two of us once again waddle hand in hand out of our suite, down through the elevator, attempt to make our way through the gauntlet of cooing staff and are instead diverted to the dining hall where I'm put into a high chair and spoon fed oatmeal mush. I whine and protest but each time I open my mouth I just get another mouthful.

Meanwhile, Andy gets a plate of pancakes which is cut up for him, but which he has to eat by hand. I get a bottle, he gets a sippy cup. It's a good thing we both get bibs, because eating this way is a messy process.

"Such good boys," coos the waiter who has finished feeding me. "A trip to Geingen really does wonders for rejuvenation, does it not?" I cross my arms to show I'm not amused.

Soon, our faces are wiped clean and we're sent off to town with a couple pats on our padded rears. Once again we enter the Zeiff workshop through the VIP entrance,

and are escorted down to meet Margarete. I sit on my chair in the workshop and scowl down at my diaper bulge while Andy swings his legs on the stool seemingly unable to keep his attention on anything for more than a few seconds. Margarete notices my attention trained on my puffy crotch.

"Well, now you don't have to worry about any silly potty breaks."

"I don't wear didees..." I say, but my voice falters. Who would believe me now? Margarete knows exactly what's happening so there's no point in arguing with her. I just have to watch as she brushes, cleans, sews and restuffs.

"There we go," she says as she finishes restoring WooWoo Bear's nose and mouth to brand new condition. "What do you think?"

"Actually that's pretty good!" I say. Then my hands fly up to my throat. My voice is so much higher pitched now. "Ack! I sound like a chipmunk!"

She takes the teddy back and continues her restoration work on his arms and legs. "All part of the restoration, right WooWoo bear?"

"I shouldn't have come," I whisper. "I'm gonna turn into a baby now..."

Margarete speaks calmly as she sews.

"You had to come back. Of course you did! That's part of what you get when you buy a Zeiff. Nobody wants to lose a dear friend. And the good news is you don't have to. You can come back as many times as you like and restore your friends to their former glory; just like new. And you **will** be coming back," she says with a smile. "Just like you did the last time" I shudder.

"W-what do you mean wast time?" I ask, but she just shushes me as she puts the finishing touches on WooWoo bear.

"There we go, as good as new!" she says finally, and hands the new bear over to me.

"Dis is weiyowd... I'm outta heyow," I say, and I hop off the seat to run away but I feel my legs give out under me and I hit the floor, only able to get up on my hands and knees. Now that she's restored his body I feel weak and helpless. And somehow... everything seems to have grown. Or I've shrunk. I start to cry, clutching the teddy. The security guard comes by with a stroller.

"Little tyke will need this until he gets a bit older," He says, lifting me up and placing me in the seat. Then he pops a pacifier in my mouth.

"C-can we go home now?" asks Andy, who clearly looks uncertain about what to do. Like a little lost child who is looking for a grown-up.

"Don't worry sweetie," says Margarete. "You'll have a new home soon and you'll have no memory of any of this. The teddies will take care of you for now. Both of you."

I fuss and wiggle in the stroller but can't get out. Soon, I tucker myself out and snuggle my teddy for comfort.

"That's it, little one. Forget all about being a grown up. At least for the next thirty years..."