

Miss Julie's Home for Wayward Girls

By Lynn Jatania

This is day one hundred and thirty-seven that I've been here at Miss Julie's, with the other inmates. That's what we like to call ourselves, inmates, 'cause even though we're free to come and go and whatever, none of us ever likes to go out. It's hot and most of us are uncomfortable enough walking from here to the toilet, which I have to do sixteen times a day now, so who wants to walk all the way to Mac's Grocery, which is a good half hour each way, and then ten minutes farther on if you want to get some KFC? And everyone staring at you all the time with your big round belly and no wedding ring? Most days it's just too much effort.

So here we sit. We got an old TV, so old that you gotta waddle over to it to change the channel on the dial, but it still gets the shows and we can watch our stories every afternoon. I got a pack of cards and sometimes I can get a game of Crazy Eights going. I tried to teach the other girls Bridge but it was too much for them. Their condition does lead to a bit of addle mindedness, there's no doubt about it, but it's clear I could whoop them at Bridge even if they were in their right minds so there really isn't any point in pushing it.

There's another girl here, Kelly, it's actually her second time here so she knew a little better what to bring. She has some knitting needles and she's teaching us all how to knit. I'd rather play cards myself but it's something to pass the time. Most of us are in the scarf making stage. We just make scarves, longer and longer until Kelly tells us *that's enough* and then she ends it for us. I'm sure I don't know what I'll do with all these scarves in the heat, but it keeps my hands busy, and you know, idle hands and all that, as Miss Julie is always saying.

So every day me and the girls sit in the common room on the old couch – the last one in has to sit on the big stain where Jess broke her water last year. I wasn't here for that one but it's legend, and keeps getting passed on from girl to girl so the story never gets old, never dies. Whenever a new girl comes there's always a crackle of anticipation in the room as we all lean forward to see who will get to tell her the story first. Bonus points if you can get her sitting in the spot before you spill the beans.

I have a lot of bonus points.



Cameron is my boyfriend and I'm luckier than most of the girls because he still comes around to see me every now and again. He brings presents, too. He's big on the environment so he doesn't believe in the collection of things but he'll bring me a container of ice cream or a chocolate bar or something else sweet. He was really good about it when I had to move here. At first he was all, *why bring a child into this world when we're just ruining the planet and condemning it to a pathetic life in an apocalyptic future?*

I always did think he looked especially cute when he talked like that. When he gets really passionate his dreadlocks kind of shake back and forth and there's this earthy smell that comes out of them that is just ir-re-sis-table.

(Usually when I mention this around the common room, I get a round of high-fives because when Cameron comes to visit, let's just say I'm not the only one who likes to sit and listen to him tell us about global warming and whatever.)

Anyway, when I decided to have the baby in spite of the coming apocalypse, he wasn't mad or anything. I mean, he does continue to point out that the kid will probably have to fight for food and the whole balance of the earth will be thrown off because there probably won't be any bees or polar bears left by the time the kid is grown, or something like that. You'd have to ask him.

In the meantime I try to make all the girls in the house recycle and up until a couple of weeks ago I was really careful to always put it out, but now I sometimes have trouble sleeping and then I oversleep in the morning and I miss it. But a new girl came this week called April and she listens hard when Cameron comes by and I think I can get her to take over the recycling job soon, which will help us all, or so I understand it.



My parents came by the other day. They try to come when they can, but they work and they've got my little sisters to look after so they're pretty busy. They always say how lucky we all were that I got a spot here, and I suppose I am. Miss Julie is nice and there's no way I'd be up to doing any school like this. So I'm off on a "little holiday," so they say, but it's a holiday that's mostly boring and mostly tiring and not nearly as fun as they seem to think it is.

Miss Julie came in while they were here to say hello, she does like to act like a good hostess when the parents are visiting. Not that she isn't a nice lady, don't get me wrong, but she does have a special level of smile for when someone's parents come by. She had some paperwork for us to look over. My mom got a funny sad look when she was reading it over and my dad pressed his lips together real hard. Which I do not get, because it isn't even their kid. The other parents who will be taking this one are paying for my "little holiday" so it seems like it's a fair trade. Otherwise I'd be stuck at home all this time with my friends looking at me with pity and my mom looking sad all the time.

Now that the papers are all signed, we are good to go. Flag down the ship! Ready for landing! That makes me giggle, but I try to hold it in because it's very confusing for my parents with their tight lips and sad eyes.



Tanisha had her baby the night before last, and I don't know if she won the lottery or what, but she says she is going to keep it. A little girl. Miss Julie doesn't like it when there are babies in the house as it starts giving the other girls *Ideas*, she says, and you can hear the capital letter. But it's right in your contract that if you are going to keep it you get to come back for the first four weeks until you get things straightened out, so she's back and so is the baby.

She's real cute too. It's hard for me to hold her because my own belly gets in the way but when she's in her baby chair I can chat with her and talk about life. I mean, not that she's looking because she's mostly sleeping and whatever. But it's kind of nice to have the company, like having a pet. All the girls are the same way, and some of them get real starry-eyed when Tanisha comes around.

Well, maybe not one. Daisy has the room next to Tanisha and she isn't so much excited about the baby. Daisy says she cries all night and it's true that both Daisy and Tanisha have been looking a little red around the eyes lately. Maybe Miss Julie should consider having *more* babies around so we all can be exposed to a little of the bad stuff. I personally wouldn't mind.



I had a surprise visitor yesterday. Sherwin is Cameron's best friend and he was always real nice to me when Cameron and I were going out. Well, I say *were* like we're done going out,

but we haven't broken up or anything, so I guess we are still a couple, only it's hard with the distance and me not feeling much like messing around these days. Anyway, Sherwin came by to say hello and I was surprised because I didn't think anyone really knew I was here, but I guess he found out from Cameron or my mom or something.

I felt kind of weird about it because Sherwin and I always used to talk movies, that was our big thing, like what was coming out and who was in what and we'd make lists of what we wanted to see. But I haven't kept up with it and I haven't been to the movies to ages, I only have the TV stories to talk about, which seemed like a crappy second best. But I still told him a bit about them, and he really perked up when we got to Days of Our Lives because there is a great storyline right now about twin brothers in love with the same woman, and everyone in the common room joined in when I got to that part and helped me re-enact several scenes because Sherwin seemed really interested.

Then he told me all about some movies he'd seen lately, I had him tell me the whole plot of that new one that stars Chris Pine because I love him, he's my on-screen boyfriend. And we played a few rounds of that movie game where we challenge each other to name a movie starring a certain movie star, like Michael B. Jordan or Daniel Craig, and we go back and forth until one of us can't name another title, and between you and me, I think he maybe let me win this time.

Right at the end before he left, he did mention that Cameron has won a scholarship to study whales in Newfoundland for the summer, and that he might not be around as much. And I totally get that, because the whales are really suffering and it's important to save them so my kid can see a whale someday, and not have to just read about them in books. So I admire what he is doing to make the world a better place for all of us and it's totally the right call and definitely the most important thing right now.

Definitely.



So this morning I woke up feeling different, kind of like I had to be sick but nothing came out, although it was chili night last night and between you and me, Miss Julie is good at a lot of things but making chili is not one of them, so I didn't eat very much. I thought I'd feel

better after some breakfast, but I did not, and then I thought I'd feel better if I went to the bathroom, but I did not.

Then the cramps started and I didn't think the couch could take any more stainage so off to the hospital we went.

Miss Julie called my parents and my mom even took the day off work to come down and be with me, which was really nice especially since Cameron is already gone. She held my hand and wiped my brow when it was really hurting. Miss Julie had some things to do but she came by to see how it was all going and I was glad she was there, because she is very no-nonsense, Miss Julie. *None of that mumbo jumbo*, she'll say, when one of us girls starts whining or complaining. So I toughened up and I could tell she was proud of me, and I worked hard.

After it was all over, the other people came and took the baby and that was okay. I mean, it wasn't the greatest thing. But I have work to do in this world, Cameron says it is up to the young people to turn things around and save it, and my mom really wants me to finish school, and putting two and two together I could really make a difference. I didn't want to see him, the kid I mean, so I just took a deep breath when it was all over and told my mom I wanted to go to sleep and she left me alone for a while. Luckily I am pretty good at going to sleep in stressful situations as that is how I have always dealt with pressure in the past, I even fell asleep during an exam once because I hadn't studied much and I could tell it was going badly and it was all too much so my body just kind of gave up.

Same thing this time.



When I woke up I was surprised to see Sherwin in my room. I mean, I didn't think anyone could just walk in to a hospital or whatever. He told me he'd asked my mom to call him when it was time and then he came down to see if I was doing okay. And I'm not going to lie, I was not really doing okay, and Miss Julie was not around and so I found it very hard to not be all mumbo jumbo in that moment.

But Sherwin was great and pulled up his chair right next to the bed and just held my hand tight, and passed me tissues every time I had totally soaked through one, just one tissue after the next with no comment at all. Eventually I couldn't cry any more but we just sat together holding

hands and it was very friendly, and I felt like maybe things were going to be okay, just having someone from home who made it seem like I could go back and be me again and everyone would be cool with it and it would all work out.

I won't be going back to Miss Julie's because I didn't keep the kid and that's in the contract too, if you don't keep it you can stay with her for a few more weeks but the cost is on you and my parents are ready to just take me back home and help me rest up. Maybe I'll go by to tell the girls goodbye because I will miss them, and I was halfway through a really nice blue scarf that would look sharp on Sherwin, but on the other hand, if I never see that stained couch again it will be too soon. There's a kind of smell in the air of being stuck, all those inmates shut in and just waiting, waiting, waiting.

My waiting time is over. It's time to go home.