III

The most difficult part of Amber’s job wasn’t helping Mayor Klein keep Knubbig running—it was keeping Mayor Klein in her seat.

Despite what she had grown up thinking about politicians, Sherry wasn’t nearly as prone to kicking up her feet as the types of fat cats that ran her home town were. In fact, she was a relatively active woman in the literal sense—not only was she a face about town, she was also the sort of woman who woke up early so that she could squeeze in some exercise time before spending all day in her office.

Needless to say, Amber didn’t need Devlin whispering in her ear to know that *that* needed to stop. At least if she wanted to get anywhere with what she’d been tasked.

But knocking her off of her normal routine in the mornings had some side-effects—she was grouchier. Sleepier. A little shorter with Amber than she probably ought to have been. It wasn’t all of the time, but it was becoming enough of a frequent occurrence that Amber had to remind herself that it would all work out in the end… at least, according to her *other* boss. Most of the time she apologized, but that didn’t come until after at least two morning cups of coffee.

So naturally, Amber had started bringing those out first.

“Good morning, Ms. Klein!” Amber chirped eagerly, “Do you want some coffee?”

“God, please call me Sherry, I’ve told you a thousand times already...” Sherry grumbled, “Have you looked around to find a treadmill any?”

“Uh… nope!” Amber smiled apologetically, “I’m sorry.”

Mayor Klein’s flawless skin had looked a little blotchy. There were little bags under her eyes from a lack of sleep. Puffiness around the cheeks. With the diet that Amber had been able to keep her on for the first few weeks of her employment, it was no surprise that her formerly fit body was having difficulties adjusting to the high carb, high sodium, high calorie diet. And it had only gotten worse once Sherry’s treadmill “accidentally” bit the big one in a lightning storm.

More noticeably, the tall woman’s figure had begun to soften noticeably underneath those pantsuits that she liked to wear. As she switched to Fall clothing, it was a lot more noticeable. The bulky designs meant to keep her warm and that would have accented her previously slim physique now just made her look… well, bulky.

“It’s fine.” Sherry grumbled as she snatched the plain white mug for herself, “At least you remembered not to bring me breakfast this morning…”

That hadn’t seemed like a good idea. At least, not at first. But Devlin promised that she had that part under control. And Amber had been able to talk her into letting her go to Apple Dumplin’s at least on Mondays and Fridays—just enough to ‘take the edge off’ the beginning and end of the week.

Add into the fact that she’d switched the contents of all the Half & Half containers to Heavy Whipping Cream, and it was understandable where the Mayor’s growing tummy was coming from.

“Anything special for me today, Chief?” Amber asked eagerly, “I know that there was that grand opening scheduled sometime this week, and that proposition sent forward by the Concerned Parents for Illegal—”

“I have a very special job for you today—URP—after your lunch, go get me a new Fall Wardrobe.” Sherry hurked as she pounded her chest, “And some antacid tablets while you’re at it.”

Amber couldn’t even pretend to be a little surprised. Gaining about forty pounds in two months was going to have its effects. And the greasy takeout that had been the Mayor’s semi-regular lunch for about thirty of those pounds was bound to leave her with some indigestion.

“Sure thing, ma’am!” Amber saluted playfully, “Do you just want me to go a size up, or—”

“Just one size.” The mayor held up a finger, “Maybe two if it’s a brand that runs small. But if anyone asks, you’ve got a tall cousin. This is NOT for me. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“Good.”

Sherry slumped into her chair, self-consciously covering the growing paunch that was pressing against her biggest blouse and roomiest blazer. The double chin that had formed in the small amount of time that Amber had started working there folded cutely into another tight little frown as she leaned forward to grab her cup of coffee—a fatty grunt of either exertion or dealing with her too-tight ensemble. Probably both.

“Did you make sure to get the non-fat creamer this time?” Sherry eyed the cup maliciously, “I’m trying to cut back on my sugar intake.”

“Of course.” Amber lied with a smile, “After all, I’m here to do my job the best I can.”

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Two months into her new life in Knubbig, and Amber still hadn’t quite gotten used to the fact that she didn’t have atrocious luck anymore.

Take, for instance, her lunchtime dates with Linda.

If the old Amber had been able to even *score* a date (which she hadn’t—not in a long, long time!) then she would have constantly been on the lookout for things to go wrong. Things that could catch on fire, things that she could slip on, things that would accidentally reveal that the man next to them had been having an affair with his wife and that would cause a scene and make everyone uncomfortable and spoil the mood between Amber and her date…

She’d had a long, long life okay?

But things were different now. All she had to do was look at Linda, play it cool, and try not to break anything. And so far, it had been great—two months of steady, solid, girlfriending despite having almost no experience with it in the past.

If Devlin had thrown this deal in for free as a part of her deal… well, Amber certainly wouldn’t have been complaining!

“Sorry to hear that Sherry’s giving you the run around.” Amber’s girlfriend of two months said with a little tug at her lips, “I’d say that I’d pull her over on her way home from work, but… you know, she’s kind of my boss too.”

The two of them shared a laugh.

“It’s okay—I appreciate the fact that you at least thought about it.” Amber rubbed the back of her lunch date’s hand, “Besides, shopping for my boss isn’t exactly the worst thing that I’ve ever had to do. In fact, it might be kind of fun to get out of the office and do a little shopping. I only really get to do that kind of stuff on the weekends.”

“Ooh, look at you—abusing your power as the Mayor’s Aide.” Linda chuckled, “You sure she won’t mind?”

“Nah, she’s got a really easy schedule today. I’ll be okay if I take a little longer on my one errand of the day.”

“And on your lunch break?” Linda cocked an eyebrow with a hopeful playfulness, “You sure she won’t mind you taking an extra thirty minutes or so?”

“You’re the chief of police—I can just say it was a business meeting and call it at that.”

Linda chuckled as she and Amber made eye contact.

It had only been two months since they had started seeing one another, but there had been an (almost) instant connection between the two of them. Linda put up this façade of tough-as-nails police chief, but Amber had been able to see inside that she had the heart of a pussycat. They were spending at least three lunch breaks a day together—and when you worked for the local government (at least, as high up as the two of them were) those lunch breaks could be at least an hour at a time. If not longer!

Sundays were for movie nights and snuggling. Fancy dinners out on the town… Linda had done her part to show Amber around Knubbig and introduce her to some of the best places that were around, and Amber had wasted no time in getting acclimated with the downtown scene (such as it was, given how small Knubbig was!) so that she could show her girlfriend a good time…

“I’m gonna get up and grab some seconds—do you want anything?”

“No thanks, baby.” Amber looked at her all doe-eyed, “You get what you want.”

“Suit yourself.”

Linda grunted as she pushed herself away from the table—a soft belly pressing against the boring beige uniform of the Knubbig police department, and her hips pressing hard against the seam of her coffee-brown slacks.

“I’m going back for more of the meatloaf.”

Amber couldn’t help but notice the chance in Linda’s appearance. After only two months, her butt was widening and her tummy was softening. Who was she to complain about her hot cop girlfriend getting a little thick?

“I’m interested in your meat loaf.”

Amber swatted at her girlfriend’s plump rump, more than a little enamored with amount of jiggle there was underneath those khakis.

“Be careful—I’ve got a 9mm strapped to my hip!”

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Sedson Duds’ Outfitters was hardly the place that Amber had gotten used to shopping at.

Even for her professional wear, she had much preferred to keep it affordable. But at the same time, Sherry had explicitly said that money was no object. And it seemed like a good idea to pamper her boss a little. Make sure that she got the best of the best. Devlin hadn’t told her not to, after all, and it felt like a nice way to make up for…

Well, making her fat and logy in the first place.

After all, if she had to be fat, couldn’t she at least be fat and fashionable?

*A woman after my own heart, it seems…*

“It’s not like that.” Amber answered Devlin aloud habitually now, as it was the most clear way to get her thoughts across, “I’m just trying to do something nice.”

*To make up for the things that you’re doing that are… less than nice?*

“If you want to look at it that way…”

Amber flipped through the rack of clothes. Her boss was more than a little hard to shop for, given her broad shape and tall build. She was a little bit more “more” than most women, and through Amber’s subtle influence, there was more than a bit more “more” to go around. She was almost ready for the big and tall section all by herself, so shopping for through the Larges would have to do for now…

“Anything that I can help you find today, ma’am?”

“Oh no thank you, I’m just look—”

Amber had stopped dead in her tracks as soon as she realized the person that she was talking to. It hadn’t taken longer than a few seconds for the realization to hit. After all, such a traumatic experience so soon before she moved into town was going to have long-reaching consequences. She hadn’t seen her since the day she moved to town and everything had gone haywire—but Amber had recognized her almost immediately…

“Oh it’s… it’s you!”

Amber had come face to face with the woman whom she had backed into on her first night in Knubbig, getting the police involved yet again after being released from an afternoon in the pokey.

“It’s… it’s you.”

“Oh my goodness…” the small woman looked away awkwardly, “You’re… the woman who backed into my BMW, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, that’s… that’s me.”

Amber hadn’t thought much about that since it had happened. It was all just such a blur, up to and including the pact with her own personal devil. The fact that she’d rear-ended somebody in the parking lot to the Police Station had just seemed like icing on the cake. And even though she had been given plenty of reminders in the form of a rather large bump in her insurance payments each month, she hadn’t much time to think about…

“Maddy Sedson.” The small woman extended a hand, “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Oh shit.” Amber had said out loud, “Oh man, I… I never really expected to see you ever again.”

“Well… honestly, I never expected to see you again either.” The woman put her hands on her hips and exhaled with a pained smile, “But I mean, what with this place having the population of a football stadium, well… I guess it was kind of inevitable.”

“You can say that again.”

Amber took Maddy’s hand with some trepidation, shaking it heartily before rreturning it to its rightful owner. A short, round-faced brunette with pixie-like features and a little bob to boot. Amber hadn’t been in the headspace to think about the woman that she had backed into way back when it had happened, but it was clear from the get-go that she wasn’t your average Knubbigite.

“My name’s—”

“Amber. I know from the insurance papers.” The smaller woman said, “You… haven’t been in town very long, have you?”

“Uh… no.” Amber answered sheepishly, “Why do you ask?”

“Because I grew up here, and *most* people can recognize me by now.”

There was a long, awkward silence as Amber tried to piece two and two together.

“Wait… Maddie *Sedson*?” Amber asked with not small amount of aghast, “As in *Sedson’s Duds* Sedson? As in *the store that we’re standing in right now Sedson*?”

“The one and the same.” Maddie extended her palms in a gracious little mock bow

“Dude you’re like a freakin’ *billionaire!”* Amber cried out rather loudly, “What are you doing in a little town like this?!”

“Like I said—I grew up here.” Maddie raised a brown eyebrow, “What about you? That license plate was all the way from New York.”

“Oh! Um… I just…”

And from there, Amber told Maddie her long and sordid (slightly edited, to avoid mentioning any talk of demonology and contractual work for said demons) story about having moved from the Big City ™ and to the tiny town of Knubbig so that she could make a new life for herself.

It was a really engaging conversation, mostly because Amber still wasn’t used to people actually wanting to hear her life story, and went on for a bit longer than it should have.

Well… a bit longer than a bit.

“Oh shit, it’s four ‘o’ clock.” Amber recoiled as she looked at her cell phone, “I’m so sorry, I’ve got to go—Mayor Klein is gonna be pissed that I took so long to deliver her new clothes…”

“These are… Sherry’s clothes?” Maddie’s brown eyebrow cocked again, “Are you sure? These are a size bigger than she normally wears…”

Suddenly the realization hit her like a ton of bricks.

“*You’re* why she told me to come to this store.” Amber said in a flash of realization, “You’re like, her personal shopper or whatever.”

“Mostly the whatever part.” Maddie shrugged, “I make sure that she’s dressed well and it doesn’t cost the taxpayers *too* terribly much.”

“Do you think that you could extend that same courtesy to me?” Amber begged with a smile, “Even though I hit your car?”

“Even though you hit my car.” She laughed, “Come on, I’ll check you out over here at the registers…”

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By the time that Amber got home from work, she always felt exhausted.

She wasn’t quite sure why, given that she didn’t actually do a lot of physical labor. But keeping up with Sherry’s schedule changes as they were dictated to her on two fronts was exhausting in and of itself. Never mind all of the running around that she did to keep her boss in her chair…

*Feeling a bit overworked?*

The sound of flames burning through in a quick flare was enough to alert Amber to Devlin’s presence. She hardly even flinched anymore. Mostly.

“A little.” Amber sighed, rolling on her bed to face the devil, “This is a lot of hard work.”

“Imagine how I feel.” Devlin chuckled darkly, “But your life is still running to your satisfaction? You’re enjoying the job? The girlfriend? The pay raise? Not destroying literally everything you touch because you were given an unfortunate amount of bad luck?”

“Um… yeah, it’s all going great I suppose…”

“Splendid.” Devlin grinned as she scribbled a few things on her clipboard, “Now, there are just a few notes that I’d like to make for next week…”

“Ugh, more notes?” Amber groaned, “Dev, I’m doing my best, okay?”

“And I have no doubt in my mind that *you believe* this to be your best work.” Devlin nodded, “But at the same time… we’ve both got numbers to make, sweetie.”

Amber grumbled to herself as she rocked to a seated position on the edge of the bed. Her feet were sore from walking around in those heels all day, and her pantyhose had started to run. She’d make a mental note to change into pajamas before she started these long end-of-week meetings with Devlin…

“The Mayor is chugging along fine, but I think that there are some minor tweaks that we could arrange to make her life a little easier.”

“We want her chunky and grumpy—the grumpier, the better.”

“How does that make MY life any easier?” Amber whined, “She’s just gonna take that out on me, Dev.”

“Which is why I’m going to tip the scales in your favor with that cute little police chief, Linda.” Devlin explained as if it were the most simple thing in the world, “Honestly, do you think that I’d just leave you out to dry like that? Come on. You know me better than that by now.”

“Wait—you can do that?”

“Of course I can, honey.” Devlin clicked her pen, small sparks flying from the tip as she readied it, “All it takes is a little paperwork…”