

## The Rehabilitation of Kylie

Written by Max Harper

Part Seven: Peace

“Sisters?” Lucy scoffed, “Not on your fucking life you psychotic bitch.”

Her voice was low so that only Kylie could hear her. She hopped off of the changing table and set the bottle down. She tried in vain to push the diaper off her hips but she couldn't get a grip on it with her hands covered in mittens. Frustrated, she gave up and tried pulling the mittens off of her hands. Tied to the bracelets, they wouldn't budge either. Lastly, she tried to get the cap off of the bottle of juice. Her fingers kept sliding off the plastic and in a fit of frustrated rage, she slammed the bottle down on the changing table and stomped away.

“Are you okay?”

“No. I'm not fucking okay. My life has officially ended. I'm trapped in this house being tortured by some twat under the guise that it's all for my own good.”

“What do you mean by tortured?”

“Are you blind? Do you not see where we are and what we are wearing? I mean, I've done some bondage before but I've never had someone make me wear diapers!”

“They aren't all that bad.”

“Says you, I'm sure you like wearing them, but news flash, we aren't all sickos like you.”

“I'm not sick, Lucy. Not like that.”

“Oh sure. You're not sick. You're mentally deranged! No rational adult has ever wanted to wear diapers on purpose.”

“Why do you have to be so mean? Why can't you just accept that other people may be different from you?”

“Different? There is a big difference between different, and perverse. This little game that you are playing is perverse, sick beyond comparison. You need serious psychiatric help!”

“I'm getting it. With Donna.” Lucy stopped ranting and looked at Kylie. Kylie slid off of the changing table, loud crinkling coming from under her skirt, and walked over to Lucy's bottle. She pried off the protective cap and held it out to Lucy. “I can only imagine what you think of me, Lucy. You've been nothing but cruel to me since we met at cheer camp, but I'm not some irrational person that wears her bullying on her sleeve, or carries that baggage around with her in any literal sense. Despite what you may think, my world doesn't revolve around you and this,”

She gestured to what she was wearing, “wasn't caused by you.”

Lucy tentatively took the bottle from Kylie's hand. She could drink from it at least, it wasn't how she wanted to drink it, but it was something. She wasn't willing to have Kylie see her drinking like a baby from a bottle.

“I'm here because I chose to be. I'm dressed like this because this comforts me. I don't really care what you think about me or how I live my life. When I don't have to worry about being my mother's perfect angel, I can be happy. I don't expect you to understand what I'm going through but before you set it in your mind that we are all sick people, I'd urge you to reconsider.”

“Reconsider? Reconsider what? Wearing diapers? What is there to think about? It's not normal, it's not hygienic, and frankly, it's fucking disgusting. I don't want to be someone's twisted fantasy, trapped in this house, and being treated like some weird sex slave.”

“Has she hurt you?”

“She's tortured me. She kidnapped me. And she won't let me leave.”

“But how? What has she done?”

“Did you not see me gagged, in a straightjacket, and wearing this ridiculous thing?”

“Yes. But that's not technically torture. I'm sure she told you about the rules and why you are here.”

“That's not the point.”

“That is exactly the point, Lucy. You're projecting your anger onto her. She's just doing her job.”

“Her job? This is a job for her? Someone is paying her to treat me like this? It’s inhumane! You all wait until my father hears about-” Lucy went silent, remembering what Penny had told her.

“Your father wanted you here, didn’t he?”

“He couldn’t! How could he?! I was his only child!”

“You still are his child.”

“Then why would he want this to happen to me? What did I do so wrong?” Lucy cried, dropping her bottle and running to a corner and slouching in it.

“I don’t know, Lucy. I don’t know hardly anything about you. But I do know that this program we are in is supposed to help us deal with our issues and make us better people.”

“I am a good person. I am…”

Kylie grabbed Lucy’s bottle and carried it over to where Lucy was. She sat down next to Lucy, setting the bottle down nearby. She wrapped her arm around the crying girl.

“Can I tell you a secret? Something that I’ve never told anyone ever?” Lucy sniffed and wiped the tears off her cheeks. She nodded at Kylie, too distraught to care about being held. “I know exactly why I’m here. I’m here because my parents screwed me up. My dad left me and my brother when I was very young and my mom tried to compensate for his absence by trying to do everything herself. When he left, I lost everything and the longer my life goes on, the more that wound hurts. My mother stopped loving me and in some way, blames me for him leaving.

“I tried to deal with it on my own but I haven’t been successful. I’ve never been able to confront my mother about any of this, especially face to face, and all that pent up emotion has had a physical effect on me. You and Cassie Briggs found that out that day at camp. You locked me in the boy’s locker room in just my underwear until I peed myself. Ever since then, any time when I get too stressed out, I wet myself. I wanted to blame you for all of it but the cause runs deeper than some mild bullying. When my mom found out, she tried to force me to stop, and when force didn’t work, punishment and humiliation were next. So, when she couldn’t get me to stop, she put me back in diapers.

“I hated her at first, like I hated you, but the more time I spent not having to worry about making it to the bathroom in time, the less stressed I was. I was happy, even. I knew then and I know now that this isn’t normal, but I’m at my happiest when I don’t have to be that scared girl that can’t get through a single day without wearing a pad to keep my pants dry.

“Why am I telling you this? Because I want you to understand me. I want you to understand that what you see, isn’t all that I am. Am I wearing diapers? Yes. Do I like to wear them? Yes. Do I think that I will wear them forever? No. My time with Donna is helping me understand what happened to me and how it’s affecting my life. When I can come to terms with all of that, then I can move on from this place and you can too. I believe that you can and if there is anything that I can do to help you, I will. The hardest part of finding help is understanding that you are not alone.”

Lucy had stopped crying. She was resting her head on Kylie’s shoulder, listening to the story. Kylie was not the person that Lucy had thought she was. She didn’t want to admit that she deserved to be here. She wasn’t ready to look into herself and see her hidden truth. After being alone with Penny for so many weeks, she was grateful just to be held.

“I…I’m sorry, Kylie. For what I did to you. At the ball.”

“It’s okay. Turns out that I wasn’t the only one there in diapers. All of those girls that were paraded in front of us wore them too.”

“What kind of world did we fall into?”

“A world that we never knew existed. But, at least we look cute!”

“You look cute. I’m just in a tee shirt and this thing.” She tapped her diaper, making it crinkle.

“It looks good on you. You should see how it hugs your butt.”

“Stop trying to make me feel okay about all of this. It won’t work.”

“Okay. I won’t say anything about it. I promise.”

“Making promises with your enemy now? Doesn’t that seem foolish?”

"You are not my enemy. You never were. My enemy is in here." Kylie tapped her head. "Admittedly, you are the last person I thought I would see in this program, but I'm glad you're someone that I know."

"You don't know me. No one does."

"You sound so lonely."

"Don't give me that typical lonely rich girl schtick. I've heard it all before."

"Then let me get to know you."

"Why?"

"Because. No one should have to go through this alone."

"Why? Why help me? After all that I've done?"

"Because everyone deserves forgiveness and compassion. I don't know your story. Or your hurt. Who am I to judge who you are? Or who you could be?"

Lucy sat there quietly for a moment. Forgiveness and compassion were not things she was used to getting from people she had picked on. Hatred and scorn, those were things familiar to her. Her soul felt so dark, even surrounded by all the bright pastel colors.

"I'm scared, Kylie. I'm scared of being left alone with her. You don't know what she's like."

"I don't. And I'm sorry. But if I've learned anything, it is that they act based on our behavior. Everything they do is a direct reaction of what we've done."

"I haven't done anything."

"I did, once." Kylie said, not believing Lucy. "I talked back and said some mean things and I was punished for it. I learned quickly that they are in charge, no amount of fighting them was going to make anything better."

"Did she hit you?"

"She spanked me. Once. It hurt a lot, but it was because I didn't do what I was told."

"We aren't children. They can't treat us like this."

"I think that's the point, though. We are children. Sure, by age we are adults, but we have both shown how immature we really are. I wet my pants and my bed. At nineteen. That's really immature."

"And being put back in diapers and treated like a baby is the answer to that?"

"For me, maybe. I don't know how to really explain it. It sounds weird and maybe I am weird, but I like this. I like being treated like this. Because although it's not ideal, I know that Donna cares for me in a way that my parents never did. I need to start my life over. And this is how I'm going to do it. Maybe if you stopped fighting it and just let her take care of you, it wouldn't be so bad."

"You want me to let her treat me like a baby?"

"I want you to try. It has to be better than being tied up and forced. They aren't allowed to really hurt you, or do anything permanent, and there is a way out if she isn't able to help you."

"A way out? What way? How do I get out?"

"There's more to this than just saying that you want out. They try a lot of different things before they would say that you can't be helped. They could move you to a different house and the next person could be worse than Penny. All I'm saying is that you should give being a baby a try. It's not as bad as it sounds and a lot of your hesitations are in your head."

"There are people worse than her?"

"There could be. I know that they have never given up on someone and no one has ever failed out of this program."

"I just want to go home." Lucy said, exasperated, her emotions were running high again.

"And I want something to drink." Kylie said, looking around for her bottle. It was still sitting on the changing table. "Are you thirsty?"

Lucy nodded, but shook her head when presented with her bottle of juice. "Not like that."

"I can't get the nipple off. I tried. And even if I did, I'm sure we would both be punished for it." Kylie got up and went to get her bottle off the table. She popped the nipple in her mouth and

began suckling from it. The milk was cooling down but still tasted as she expected. Lucy looked at her in amazement.

“You are awfully cavalier about that.”

“Girls gotta eat.”

“How do you do it? How do you just accept all of this?”

“By letting it put me in the right mindset.”

“What mindset?”

“The mindset of being at peace. I know how all of this looks and sometimes, I feel ridiculous, but it’s how it makes me feel that matters most to me. I feel like everything outside that window or that door doesn’t exist anymore. It all goes away and it’s just me, in this moment, and it leaves me at peace with my life. And in those moments, I’m safe. Nothing can bother me, and no one can hurt me.”

“And this happens a lot?”

“Every day. I spend more time like that than I do being the grown up woman that I’m supposed to be.”

“And you think that I could do that too? Feel like you feel?”

“If you are willing to try. You have to cast off the grown you, and just be in the moment.”

“How?”

“Well, let’s see. How about we climb up into the crib and lay down.”

“...okay.”

“Bring your bottle.”

Lucy was hesitant, but brought it. She was unsure about where this was all headed, but she felt compelled to at least give it a try. Kylie crawled up into the crib first and patted the spot next to her. Lucy followed her. She hated the crib but at least it was more comfortable than the floor.

“Okay, now what?”

“Now, let’s lay down.” The girls laid down. The ceiling above them was decorated with fairy princesses and unicorns. There was a mobile hanging just out of their reach. Kylie stood up on her tiptoes and managed to turn it on. It spun slowly and played a calming tune. She laid back down and looked at Lucy.

“Bottoms up!” She said. She stuck the nipple back into her mouth and waited. Lucy tried to follow suit but couldn’t quite go through with it.

“It’s all too weird. I don-”

“Shhh.” Kylie said, taking the bottle from Lucy’s hand and pressing it against her lips.

“You’re thinking too much. Just let it go. It’s juice. It’s safe. You are safe. I won’t let anything happen to you.” She slid her arm under Lucy’s head and rubbed the nipple across her lips. “It’s okay. I promise, everything will be okay.”

Lucy’s lip quivered for a moment. She locked eyes with Kylie and Kylie smiled. “That’s it. Look at me. It’s okay. I’m here. You’re safe.”

Lucy’s lips parted and the nipple slid into her mouth. She was parched from being gagged for so long and was very thirsty. She never took her eyes off of Kylie as she began to drink from the bottle.

“There you go. That’s a good girl. Such a good girl. I’m so proud of you.”

Lucy drank more from the bottle, Kylie’s soothing words coupled with the hypnotic properties of drinking from a bottle calmed her. She lay in Kylie’s arms and for the first time in weeks, felt safe.

“Is that good? My, you were really thirsty!” Lucy sucked air and her focus returned. “All gone!”

“Gone? How?”

“You drank it all, silly.”

“But...it’s only been a few minutes!”

“It’s been longer than that. Half an hour by the clock over there.”

“It went by so fast!”

Kylie laughed. "It does when you let it all go. You would be amazed at what can happen when you free your minds from such grown up thoughts." She pointed to Lucy's diaper and the darkened area between her legs.

"I peed?!"

"Yes. Yes you did. And you didn't even notice that it was happening."

"Oh my god! What is happening to me?!"

"You are letting go. Now lie back down and I'll give you my bottle."

"Your- Why?"

"Because you are still thirsty."

"What about you? I thought you were-"

"Shhh." Kylie said, gently pulling Lucy back into her arms. She held the bottle of milk to Lucy's lips. "Let's try this again, shall we?"

Lucy nodded, accepting the bottle. Her head was swirling in confusion and wonder, but her belly was filling. She didn't understand what was happening to her, but in the moment, she felt better than she had since she got to this place. Her eyes drooped and she listened to the melody being played by the mobile. She looked at the butterflies spinning around slowly and felt entranced by all of it. The milk tasted slightly weird but she didn't care. Her diaper was wet, a fact that she hadn't been aware of happening, but it didn't matter. She was warm and cozy in Kylie's arms and for the moment, she finally felt safe.

Kylie watched Lucy's eyes droop closed and the girl fall asleep. It turned out that the human connection was what was missing from Lucy's treatment. It was something that Penny and Donna may not have known, or perhaps they did, and that was why Kylie was there. She didn't know. What she did know was that Lucy needed her and for some reason, Kylie needed her as well. She didn't know what it all meant or how it would all play out, but she felt connected to Lucy in a way that she never thought possible.

She rested her head on her arm as the nipple slid out of Lucy's mouth. The bottle was empty and was no longer needed. She let it fall from her hand and it rolled out of the crib and fell with a thump onto the floor. She tossed the other one out of the crib and settled in. It wasn't her crib and she didn't have Quackers, but Lucy needed her. She listened to the melody of the mobile and closed her eyes, letting herself slip back into her little space. Warmth spread as she wet herself. Content and comfortable, she slipped off to sleep.

Penny and Donna were sitting at the kitchen table, enjoying cups of tea. Donna had just come back downstairs from dropping off the bottles as the water had come to a boil.

"So, how's it been going with Lucy? I see you are still up to your old ways."

"Old ways? My ways have always been the same."

"I can tell. No matter how often you have been told that your methods are..."

"Different?"

"Some would say cruel."

"They would, and they would be wrong. My results speak for themselves. And I don't do anything without proper justification."

"And what was the justification for what I saw up there?"

"Why do you care?"

"I care because of Kylie. I worry about her seeing more than she is ready to handle. Lucy was a tormentor of Kylie's and I don't want her thinking that such treatment is acceptable."

"It isn't. I am not stupid or reckless. It was a temporary thing to hammer home her new reality."

"Like the leash? And I bet if I go down the hall, I'll find that the cage has been recently used."

"What's your point?"

"My point is that I don't like your methods."

"And coddling them is the answer?"

"Positive reinforcement is."

“You haven’t had to deal with the kind of people I have. I appreciate your concern, but I’m not going outside of protocol.”

“I hope not. I would like to bring Kylie around more often. I think it would be good for the girls to spend some quality time together.”

“We will see. I’m still not sold that Lucy is a willing participant of the program. Until then, I can’t trust that her motives are pure.”

“Maybe she needs an example to follow.”

“I take it then you are here to gloat?”

“Gloat? Why would I ever gloat?”

Penny smirked, “Because that’s what you do. You always have. You are a natural mothering type and have proved time and time again that your littles are the best behaved across the board. They are also the quickest to move on to phase two. Meanwhile, us lonely plebes back here in the trenches have to do some actual work to get some results.”

“And that is somehow construed as gloating?”

“Well, when you parade her over here just three weeks into her treatment and she’s practically attached to your tits, then yes.”

“She’s not...we aren’t there yet.”

“But she will be. And like all of the others, she will have her moment, her great breakthrough, and she will begin to heal.”

“I’m not sure that there is any great breakthrough to have. I think she already knows what caused her to come down this road. I think she just enjoys being cared for.”

“You think she’s a keeper?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe someone who will always have an affinity for this, but not one to stay in our care forever.”

“Still trying to fill that hole in your life, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know. I’m not sure that I will ever have what I had.”

“You will. Give it time. As for me, I’m in this for the thrill.”

“You always did get some kick out of being in charge.”

“Always will.”

They drank their tea, reflecting on their lives. Penny got up to boil some water for macaroni and cheese for the girls.

“Penny? Do you think that you can help her?”

“Who? Lucy?”

“Yeah.”

“No. I don’t think so. That’s not really what I do. I break people. I get them to finally go along with the program and then I get pulled off their case.”

“How do you deal with that?”

“By not getting attached. It’s easier to put them through what I do when I don’t care about them.”

“Has Moira talked to you?”

“You know she has. She has talked to you as well. You know her, she has to have her fingers in everything. So I guess we just have to get the story straight.”

“Story?”

“Yeah. The story. The same story that we’ve done for years. You file a claim that I’m abusing my clients. I get hauled into Mike’s office and my client gets taken from me. And you think that’s where it ends. But it doesn’t. You don’t know the kind of person that Mike is or what he can do.”

“I can’t tell if you’re afraid of him or turned on by the thought.”

Penny laughed. “A bit of both, actually.” She went over to the counter and grabbed a file off of it. She slid it across the table to Donna.

“What’s this?”

“Lucy’s file. Including the deposition by her father as to why he put her in the program.”

“Why are you showing this to me?”

“No particular reason. I figured that if anyone can reach that girl, it would be you.”

“That’s not how this works. I have a little already. They don’t like to group them up.”

“I know, but this wouldn’t be the first time that they’ve made an exception for you.”

Donna read through the file as Penny poured the macaroni noodles into the boiling water. She stirred them slowly as Donna flipped the pages. There was a lot in the file. Lucy had been in and out of trouble since becoming a teenager. Her father admitted to not disciplining his daughter when it could have made an impact. He had tried counselling but it hadn’t lasted long. Lucy had refused to go most times and when she did go, she wouldn’t participate. Although Mr. Hernandez had the money to keep paying, he found that there was no point if she didn’t want to change.

His deposition felt more like an admission of guilt. He blamed himself for how his daughter behaved, how she had been so cruel, and how she had embarrassed him in front of the debutantes. Towards the end, in his final few paragraphs, he authorized the Institute to regress Lucy back to babyhood, as far back as they could go, before bringing her back to adulthood. He believed that she needed a full restart as it would be the only way to rid her of the entitlement that she walked around with.

Donna closed the file and sighed. She had seen something similar with another client. Although she normally dealt with troubled girls, one of the few cases where she took on a young man was just like this. Spoiled rich kid, crying out for his parents’ attention, had gotten himself into more trouble than money could get him out of. His parents worked with their attorney to get him assigned to the Institute and after he had been broken by someone like Penny, he was sent to Donna. She had worked with him for three months, getting him into the routine and accepting the person that he had been before he had expressed his hidden truth. He had been assaulted by his uncle when he was a boy and when no one believed him, he started acting out. It was a sad tale, and she had cared for him for another four months until he was ready to move on. The last she heard, he was back out in the world, a successful young man at his family’s law firm.

“You see the similarities, don’t you?” Penny asked, stirring the last of the ingredients into the pot.

“Do you think she was abused?”

“No. Rather, I don’t know. I’m not as well trained as you are on that. But there is something there.”

“She needs a lot of work.”

“Which is why I don’t think that I’m right for this job.”

“So option out.”

“You know I can’t do that. I never quit and I never give up.”

“So what do you want me to do about it?”

“I could use your opinion.”

“I would need some time with her, to see how she behaves when you are not around. She seems a little gun shy of you.”

“So take her home with you.”

“I can’t just-”

“You can and you know it. I have another conference coming up that I need to go to, and I could use a babysitter.”

“Short term?”

“The weekend.”

“Fine. But you have to ease up on her a little but first.”

“I don’t think that will be a problem.” She bounced the spoon on the rim of the pot before setting it down. “Their lunch is ready. Shall we go see what they have been up to?”

“Absolutely. And no word about our little arrangement.”

“My mouth is shut.”

“I doubt your mouth has ever been truly shut.”

Penny smiled again, shrugging flirtatiously. She was a knockout and got around or so the office rumors went.

Upstairs, they were surprised at the sight. The girls looked as if they were asleep in the crib, wrapped up in each other's arms. The bottles lay empty on the floor. Kylie's head lifted up at the sound of the slight gasps from Donna and Penny. She groggily looked down at Lucy and at her surroundings.

"Did you have a nice nap, sweetie?" Donna asked.

Kylie nodded, rubbing her eyes. Lucy stirred and sat up, her hair matted from sweat. She yawned and stretched, and proceeded to whine at her mittens, tugging at them the best she could. Her gestures were futile and after her whining got to be annoying, Kylie pulled the pacifier off her shirt and pushed it into Lucy's mouth. Lucy stopped whining and sat there, sucking on the binky.

Kylie gently pushed Lucy out the way so that she could crawl out of the crib. She unsteadily walked into Donna's arms. Donna rubbed her back and checked her diaper. Kylie was wet but not soaked. Penny went over to Lucy who wasn't fully awake and helped her lay back down. She checked Lucy's diaper as well, and debated on changing her. She thought better of it as Lucy still needed to get used to being wet for longer periods of time.

"Are you hungry, baby?" Donna asked Kylie.

"Yes, Mommy."

"Let's go downstairs and get you some lunch, then we will go home."

"Otay."

Donna led her sleepy baby down the stairs and in a few moments, Penny and Lucy followed suit. Donna had set up a second high chair in the kitchen and was locking the tray in place for Kylie. Penny followed Donna's lead. Where she would have normally secured Lucy's hands and feet and spoon fed her, she was trying to show how compassionate she could be.

They gave the girls their bowls of macaroni and watched in silence as the girls ate. The more they did, the more awake they became. They didn't talk about what happened to them in the crib and barely looked at each other. The more Lucy woke up, the angrier she felt. She had enjoyed her time with Kylie and was angry that it was over. She was also upset at how soothing having a pacifier in her mouth was.

"All done!" Kylie exclaimed suddenly, holding up the empty bowl.

"Was it good?"

"Uh huh. Weawy good." Lucy looked at Kylie, puzzled. She had talked earlier like a normal person and now, she was talking like a small child.

"Do you want more?"

"Yes, pwease!"

Kylie bounced happily in her high chair, far too perky than Lucy had ever seen her. With her bowl refilled, Kylie went back to eating, playfully bouncing around and picking up the noodles with her fingers. Lucy watched the whole thing with great interest. She had never seen someone act like Kylie was. She looked so happy, so free.

When Kylie was done eating, Donna washed her face and her hands and helped her down from the high chair. She thanked Penny for the company and led Kylie to the door.

"Mommy?"

"Yes, baby?"

"Can I say goodbye to Lucy?"

"Of course, baby. Thank Penny for a wonderful time, too."

Kylie skipped back into the kitchen where Lucy and Penny were. She stopped in front of Lucy's high chair and looked at Penny.

"Ms. Penny?"

"Yes, Kylie?"

"Fank you for having me over to play. I had so much fun."

"You're welcome, sweetheart."

"Do you think I could play with Lucy again?"



"I don't see why not."

"Tomorrow?"

Penny smiled, "We will see how Lucy behaves tonight, but I will let your Mommy know."

"Otay." She turned back to Lucy and picked up the pacifier. She dipped it in the macaroni before pushing it into Lucy's stunned mouth. "Be a good girl so I can come play wif you again!" She spun on her heel and skipped back Donna. "I'm ready Mommy!"

"Let's go home, baby."

"Bye Lucy!" Kylie yelled as they walked out of the door into the early afternoon. The door shut before they could hear any reply.

In the kitchen, Lucy sucked the cheese of the pacifier before pulling it from her lips. She was astounded at Kylie's behavior. Astounded and intrigued.

"Penny?"

"Yes, Lucy?"

"Is that normal?"

"Is what normal?"

"How she was acting. Is that normal?"

"It's normal for good little girls that don't get in trouble."

"I see." Lucy grabbed the spoon and scooped up a few noodles. She chewed them slowly, thinking things over. Penny cleaned up the cups used for tea and the high chair that Kylie sat in.

"Penny?"

"Uh huh."

"Is that what I'm supposed to do?"

"Is that what you want to do?"

"I...I don't want to be punished anymore."

"And I don't want to punish you. It's something I have to do, when you deserve it, but I get no pleasure from seeing you like that."

"I want to be better."

"Then don't fight me on things."

"If I don't, can I see Kylie again?"

"That's up to you. If you are a good girl, then good things will happen, like seeing Kylie."

"Okay. I will be good."

"I'm glad to hear it. Finish up your lunch so I can change you."

"Then can I watch some TV?"

"As long as I approve of what you are watching."

"So we can compromise?"

"Yes. Give and take. If you accept the rules, then your life will get infinitely easier."

"Promise?"

"I don't make promises. But remember what I said. You are going back to being a baby."

"Like Kylie?"

"Similar, but not quite. Kylie is a toddler, able to do some things herself. You need to go back to basics before you can get to that point."

"Basics? Like being spoon fed and drinking from bottles?"

"Yes. Without the fight."

Lucy thought for a moment, remembering how it felt to have Kylie feed her. She looked at Penny and then at her bowl. She thought about where she could be if she hadn't fought so much, about how happy Kylie was, and how she wanted that.

She held out the spoon to Penny. "I'm still hungry, Penny."

Penny smiled and pulled up a chair, scooping the macaroni out and dumping it into Lucy's mouth. Lucy let herself be fed, trying to get back to feeling how she did with Kylie. Something was missing and they both knew what it was, but they went through the motions anyway and for the first time in a long time, Lucy was a good girl.