



CARLA S. GERFELD

#AUPAIRCHRONICLES

Carla S.Gerfeld

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*They say au pairs are just desperate housewives without the big car, fancy clothes
and rich husbands, and they couldn't be more wrong ...*

Carla S. Gerfeld

Preface

**“#AUPAIRCHRONICLES: Dear APC admin,
I need your help!!! I've slept with my best friend's host dad (he's single btw) and now he won't stop calling me. I've been avoiding him for a week, not going over to my friend's house but I don't know if I could keep this secret any longer from her. What do you reckon? Should I tell her? Could you please post this message without putting my name on it?”**

“#AUPAIRCHRONICLES: Hey, I've been dating through soooo many apps that now some au pairs think that the guy they are dating now, used to date me or fk with me and so on... which is not the case. But well, au pair world is smaller than we think and maybe I did with one here and there but not all of them. Ah! Ah!”**

“#AUPAIRCHRONICLES: I've broken my host parents' car and they want me to pay now or they will throw me out. What should I do?”

Are you shocked? Well, this is the typical type of message that I receive every day on Au Pair Chronicles without counting my social media accounts. I live in a world that you could not suspect to exist, a world where young foreigners become au pairs to live out their American dreams, a world where some people search for themselves or try to embrace their body image while others attempt to hide their sadness behind addiction and try to cope with their low self-esteem using social network sites. There is not only a story about au pairs but also a story of a new generation, somehow lost. So, get ready for scandals, love stories, drama, some wild kids, crazy host families and some happy endings ... who am I kidding? Happy endings? Not in the au pair world ...

Franziska Müller

2 A.M., Friday night in a penthouse, downtown Washington D.C.

The night was in full swing. Drake's last hit could be heard through large wireless speakers. Internet influencers, famous athletes and rich spoiled brats filled the luxury apartment; some were dancing or chatting and others were getting high, trying to make their night extra special.

Franziska Müller was sitting at the wet bar and drinking a beer with a sad look in her eyes. The beauty had a long day but pulled herself together because she couldn't miss this party, or rather her beau. From the vintage emerald green dress to the new burgundy hair color, she had done her best to look sensational, unlike other times when she had worn tiny, revealing dresses just to feel desirable. This time, her only wish was to look classy just like her favorite actresses from the 1950s and, in doing so, to please her so-called boyfriend who'd been ignoring her since she stepped foot in the party.

A few meters away, Robyn and Tara, two Instagram baddies with dark hair, flawless makeup and over 500K Insta followers, had spotted Connor Hayden and Gavin Roth, the two most famous bachelors in town. With unspoken confidence, they walked toward them and started flirting. They could already imagine how many more followers they could gain if they became their girlfriends.

On the opposite side of the room, Dean Evans, Connor's acquaintance, made his way to the bar. He was not quite a party man so saying that he was out of his element wouldn't be a lie. At twenty-five, he was already working at the White House and was very committed to his job. He hadn't wanted to come tonight; however, he had seen Connor downtown the week before for the first time in three years, and he hadn't been able to refuse his invitation. The moment Dean arrived at the bar, he noticed a girl with long, red hair and sadness in her brown eyes. She looked just like a pin-up and a bit out of place. In fact, she seemed lost in her own thoughts.

"I bet one of your friends dragged you here."

Franziska turned around and frowned.

"Pardon?"

"Judging by your face, you seem sad. I bet your friend forced you to come. Where is she?" He feigned looking around. "I gotta thank her."

She smiled and he carried on as he took a seat next to her.

“You aren’t enjoying yourself, are you?”

“Yes, I am actually,” she said sarcastically, showing him her glass.

Dean thought she had a light accent, but he wasn’t sure as the music drowned out their voices, so he moved closer to her ear.

“Alright, are you new to D.C.? I’ve never seen you before.”

“Sort of. I’ve been here for six months now.” Franziska gestured the number with her hand.

“Six months? Where were you before?”

“In Germany. I’m an au pair.”

“An au pair?”

“Yes, I’m part of an exchange program. I’m like a foreign nanny.” *As if most nannies were locals*, she wanted to add.

“Oh, I see!” he said, lifting his chin and thinking for a short moment.

“I would never hire a nanny as hot as you if you asked me.”

Franziska giggled like a schoolgirl as she twirled her red hair. Dean noticed that she looked around from time to time as if she were looking for someone, maybe her friends who had supposedly dragged her there.

“I’m Dean, by the way.”

He shook her hand. A curly strand was covering half of his face, and he was wearing glasses so Franziska couldn’t distinguish the color of his eyes. All she knew was that he made the pain in her chest less persistent.

“I’m Franziska, nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too.” Dean came closer again and added, “Would you like to go up to the balcony?”

“Yes, sure,” she agreed a little loudly so that certain people might hear her and it seemed like someone did indeed take notice.

Dean took her hand in his as they made their way outside where the breeze welcomed them. Only a few people were on the luxurious balcony, including a short girl in very high heels who was Snapchatting the incredible view from the penthouse while a guy who seemed to be her boyfriend was on his phone. *How could they not enjoy this view together? I could stay here forever.* Suddenly, it reminded Franziska of how much she wished she could be with her beau right then.

“Would you like another drink?” Dean interrupted her train of thought, seeing her almost empty glass.

“Sure, some sparkling water, please.”

“I’ll be right back.”

As he edged his way through the crowd, Franziska looked back at the building, wrapping her arms around herself to warm up. Dean was a very cute guy in a shy, nerdy kind of way and under other circumstances, she would have already had a crush on him, even after all the horrible experiences she had in the past. Yet, no matter which country she lived in, her heart always

found itself attracted to the same kind of guy. A sharp soreness threatened to show up at the thought. How could she not feel vulnerable when her supposed boyfriend had been ignoring her the whole night? What in the world could she have done to make him react that way? Just the day before they were deeply in love, and only a week ago he had told her he wanted to make things official. As a matter of fact, he was supposed to introduce her as his girlfriend tonight. *Maybe you're not good enough*, a small voice suggested in the back of her mind.

"Hey, babe."

That voice, those hands around her waist ... Franziska turned to see Connor. She knew it! Seeing her with someone else always made him want to give her the attention she needed.

"What do you want?"

"Can't I kiss my girlfriend?"

A smile danced across his lips, and he was having a hard time staying balanced. Franziska could tell he was already drunk and even though she didn't want to make a scene, it was difficult to control herself when she saw him acting so careless.

"Aren't you busy with the brunettes over there?"

She pointed to the girls he had been flirting with a few minutes ago who must've come up with him. Robyn was glaring at them without shame while Tara was already eating Gavin's face.

"I'm here now!" Connor responded playfully.

"And I don't care."

Before he had time to answer, Dean interrupted them.

"Hey, Franziska, here's your drink." He handed her a glass.

"Thank you."

Dean noticed Connor's presence and the hard look he had on his face.

"Hey, Con, is everything alright?"

Franziska looked at her boyfriend, hoping he would show his affection for her just like a knight would for his princess, but reality always happened differently.

"Yup, just saying hi to Fran. Have fun, guys." He winked before leaving to join Robyn a few meters away.

A pained look crossed Franziska's face as she saw him returning to the bimbo of the hour; however, she quickly recovered. *I won't let him affect me tonight*. She took the glass from Dean's hand and gulped down the whole thing. A smile spread across her face.

"Thanks."

"You know Connor," he remarked, but Franziska thought it sounded more like a question. Without waiting for her answer, he laughed. "Of course you do. Everyone does, right?" She gave him what looked like a half-broken

smile, and thankfully, he didn't question her further. At least she didn't need to explain everything to him.

"Would you like to go somewhere else?"

"Yeah, sure, do you have a place in mind?" Franziska asked, her voice coming out a little too high-pitched. Was it on purpose?

In any case, Connor heard it over the music, or maybe he had just guessed what was happening, judging by Dean and Franziska's expressions.

"Maybe we can go to a quiet place." He rubbed the back of his head. "Like my apartment and-" He paused. "Have one last drink?" He wasn't sure if she'd agree, but this girl was worth a try, and he couldn't hide his surprise when she nodded.

"Let me get my jacket. I'll be right back." She headed toward Connor's huge bedroom where she had left it earlier, and without great surprise, Connor followed her.

"You're leaving already?" Connor questioned as soon as they were in the room.

"I can see that you're a good guesser," she blurted out while opening his dresser. Most of his clothes were dark, making it easy to find her beige coat.

"C'mon, stay longer," Connor requested, sounding tired.

"Why?" She turned around. "Because you decide everything I do? It's crazy how you so easily acknowledge me when we're not surrounded by people."

"What do you mean?"

"Forget about it." She shook her head.

Connor sighed and took the jacket from her hands.

"C'mon, stay."

"Sorry, but I'm gonna pass." She grabbed the jacket back.

"So, you're gonna leave with Evans and ... and cheat on me?"

"Cheat on you?" she gasped, her eyes widening in disbelief.

"You blew me off the whole night, flirting with some Kylie Jenner copycat and now you're complaining? I know you're ashamed of me, but you know what? Other guys appreciate me just the way I am."

"What?" He frowned. "I would never be ashamed of you."

"Yeah, yeah! Sure! Bye Connor."

"Hold on." He took her by the arm with a convincing look in his green eyes and added, "I'm not ashamed of you, I swear."

All they could hear was the music through the walls as they stood there in awkward silence.

"I don't know ... I just feel like ..." He tried to come up with a reasonable explanation but failed. "I'm just ... I don't know ..."

“A coward,” Franziska whispered, shrugging his hand off. It didn’t take long for Connor’s face to turn twenty shades of anger as that word opened up a deep wound from his past.

“You know what Fran? Go ahead. Go ahead and fuck this guy. That’s all you’re good for anyway.” He smirked at her and it was as if he was Dr. Jekyll turning into Mr. Hyde.

“Shut up!” she yelled. “I would never do that and you know it.”

“Coming from a girl who spread her legs twenty minutes after I met her? That’s kind of hard to believe.”

And just like that, her hand flew through the air and slapped him across the face. It was a perfect, strong and precise hit. Connor’s lips turned into a smirk as though he hadn’t felt anything, and she started to attack him, trying desperately to cause him even a fraction of the pain he was causing her. He grabbed her hands and fought her off as he placed his finger on the lips that she used to love so much.

“Shhhh! You don’t wanna make a scene. My guests could hear you!” he declared in an exaggerated tone as if the slap she had just given him was for fun.

It pissed her off even more knowing how much Connor could care less about what people thought.

“I don’t care about your fuckin’ guests, you son of a bitch!”

“Gee, thanks!” He blocked her attempts at trying to break free from his grip. Quickly, his sardonic smile was replaced by a serious face, and he ordered her to calm down.

“No! Back off, motherfucker! *Arschloch!*” she insulted him in both English and German.

“Not sure I understood that last one,” he provoked her. “Come on, Fran, stop it. I’m sorry ... okay?”

Hurt, hidden by pride, made it so that Franziska couldn’t believe him yet. All she had wanted was for him to give her attention in front of his friends. She couldn’t accept it. She couldn’t let him treat her like so many men had when she was in Germany.

“Let me go!” She put her hands on his chest and pushed him with all her strength, and he finally let go of her.

“Babe, come on,” he called out, but she ignored him and headed for the door. The sound of his voice and what he said next stopped her in her tracks.

“If you go with him, I swear to God, forget about me, Franziska,” he threatened, and a few seconds of doubt invaded her body.

As much as she cared about him, and as much as she wanted to stay with him, her pride was too hurt to let her feelings take control. So, it was with a heavy heart that she kept walking, the crash of the door resonating in his ears.

Sanaa Sy

Two days later, France, somewhere between Orléans and Paris.

“We’re never gonna make it! I will miss my flight and *au revoir*, USA!” Sanaa Sy said desperately, rubbing her head in her palms.

“Sanaa, why would you leave at 6:00 if your flight is at 7:45? That gives us just over an hour to get there, and you still have to check in! We’re going to be super late!”

“How am I supposed to know that? Last time I checked, I haven’t been on a plane in ten years. Besides, I always have mom or someone with me checking up on everything!”

“That’s what I’m saying, you’re stupid.”

“No, you’re stupid ... idiot ... rat face ... foo-”

“Are you done?” he calmly interrupted his sister, not wanting to play her childish game. “It’s morning rush-hour and, obviously, there is a lot of traffic.”

Sanaa felt frustrated with her brother, but she managed to contain herself since he was driving.

But then he spoke again. “I can’t believe people will actually hire you to take care of their kids. Don’t they know that you’re still one too?”

“Shut up before I make you eat this wheel,” she said through her teeth.

“Really? And who will drive you to the airport?”

“Whatever.” Sanaa waved her hand in the air. Once again, he was right. She glared out the window, feeling desperate. She saw that tough year flashing before her eyes. Was it all for nothing? God knows it wasn’t easy. Between compiling her *au pair* file, dealing with the agency’s trouble and doing twenty-eight Skype interviews, she never thought she would make it this far.

“What time is it?” Nael asked, interrupting her thoughts. Even if his eyes were on the road, he could feel Sanaa’s desperation.

“Ten ’til seven! It’s too late! I’m screwed!” Sanaa rested her head against the window, wanting to bawl her eyes out. How could she have thought that living one hour away from Paris would save her from morning traffic?

“Whose fault is that?” Nael muttered. He couldn’t help it. Sanaa might be his sister, but she had always been the kind of girl with her head in the clouds.

“You know what Nael?” she began, “Do me a favor—shut up and do your job!”

“I’m only telling the truth, so stop complaining like a little girl, because it’s stressing me out!” he yelled, irritated in a way only brothers can be and Sanaa didn’t feel like answering him since she knew he was right. Instead, she gave him a killer sister glare. *Idiot!*

She slammed her head against the back of her seat and folded her arms under her chest, catching her reflection in the right-side mirror. She saw her caramel skin, curly black hair and dark eyes staring back, her whole face in a pout.

“I look pathetic,” she mumbled. “And ugly. No wonder I always need filters when I take pictures.”

Nael checked his head as he tried to keep himself from laughing. Here it was ... Sanaa the drama queen was back.

“I confirm, you are ugly.” He laughed while she slapped him on the head.

“Stop it, *sale folle!* I’m driving!”

“Yes, and you’re lucky you are.”

“We will be there in just fifteen minutes!” Nael said, changing the subject.

Ten excruciatingly long minutes later, the road finally cleared and the *Charles de Gaulle* sign approached with a glimmer of hope.

“Do you think I can still make it? Will they let me in?” Sanaa was staring at Nael, hoping he would say yes as if everything depended on his answer.

“I don’t know, but we’ll do our best,” he said quietly but Sanaa heard the doubt in his voice.

“That wasn’t helpful. You could have just said yes to reassure me!”

“Sanaa! What do you expect me to say? I’m not gonna lie.”

“Whatever! Stop talking and stay focused on the road,” she ordered, rubbing her forehead.

“Deep breaths,” she calmly told herself as she looked at Au Pair Chronicles’ fan page on Nael’s phone. Maybe reading some crazy au pair stories would help calm her down. But all she saw were stories about au pairs in rematch and having trouble with their host kids. *Oh, no!* Maybe the whole thing wasn’t a good idea. Maybe she’d end up in rematch too. Maybe her host kid would be a crazy psychopath, like in the movie *Orphan*, or maybe her host parents would make her work for more than forty-five hours, and she’d be too scared to say anything!

Stop it, Sanaa. She tried to reassure herself. *Please, God! Allow me to take that plane. You know more than anyone how much I need to go to the United States to start all over, to have a new beginning, even if it's only for a year. I need this adventure to figure out who I am and forget this life which is not what I want ... plus, I'm pretty sure I'll be the best au pair this kid will ever have 'cause ... well, duh!* After fifteen more minutes of anxiety, they finally reached the airport.

"Here we are! Thank God! Sanaa, take your small bag, and I'll grab the rest of your luggage!"

No sooner said than done, they got out of the car and ran to the British Airways section of the airport. Two stewardesses, both very tall and attractive and dressed in navy-colored uniforms, were standing there. Sanaa stepped closer to the stewardess on her right and handed over her ticket.

"Excuse me, miss. I have a flight at 7:45. Here's my boarding pass."

"I'm sorry, miss. The boarding gate is now closed. We are no longer allowing passengers onto the plane. Will you please step aside? People are waiting to register for their next flight."

What? No! Was this it? Was it over? Was it all for nothing? Was this a sign from God? NO! It couldn't be! I didn't have twenty-eight interviews for nothing! Twenty-eight interviews for God's sake!

Sanaa's mind was spinning too fast, but, eventually, she found the courage to come back to reality as she looked at her brother for help, even though it was too late. All those days of compiling her au pair portfolio, applying for the visa, visiting the Sweet Care Au Pair office in Paris—they were all for nothing. How could she have messed things up so quickly?

"Miss, please!" Nael begged desperately, facing the stewardess. "We drove for three hours. My sister is with the Sweet Care Au Pair Agency, and if she misses this plane, the repercussions will be consequential to her employment."

Sanaa blinked as she stared dumbfounded at the stewardess. She was always stunned by her brother's determination. When he really wanted something, he fought for it until the end. He had such a hopeful mind, unlike her.

"I am sorry, sir, but there is nothing I can do."

I knew it. In Sanaa's mind, as frustrating as the situation was, it reminded her of a scene from a TV show that ended with a cliffhanger just before the closing credits. Unfortunately, this was real life, and in real life, the heroine didn't always make it.

No Shades of Beige for Franziska

Bethesda, MD, U.S.A.

“*Scheiße!* 139 lbs!” Franziska exclaimed to her best friend, au pair Karolina Kowalska, on the phone. In reality, the scale displayed 144 lbs, but she was too ashamed to confess it.

“I need to slow down on the liquor. Otherwise, I’ll never get rid of these kilos,” she muttered sadly as she stepped off the scale and sat on the edge of the bathtub, her mind drifting through all the drinks she had over the past few weeks during Connor’s parties. Now she knew why he had ignored her during the soiree—he couldn’t be with a fatty. Even if he denied it, she knew the truth. Everyone did, didn’t they?

“Ah! Ah! Welcome to the club. I also need to lose weight!”

What weight? Please! Franziska thought to herself. Karolina had one of the best bodies she had ever seen, which was only enhanced by her perfect porcelain skin and her gorgeous golden locks.

“I was acting like a kid! I shouldn’t have provoked him.” She changed the subject back to Connor again. It’s all she wanted to talk about, but Karolina kept switching topics.

“You think?” her friend asked in a neutral tone.

“Yes, I was stupid.”

“Fran ...”

“Kare, I know what you’re gonna say, and I swear I’m not trying to defend him, but I shouldn’t have left with Dean.” Franziska stood up and started slowly pacing in her host parents’ large bathroom.

“But nothing happened.”

“I know that, but he doesn’t know it, and now I’m sure he thinks I’ve cheated on him.”

“How can he think you’ve cheated when he can’t even acknowledge that you’re his girlfriend.”

Franziska swallowed as she accepted the truth she hadn’t wanted to hear, at least not from her friend.

“Yeah ... you’re right. Anyway, how is your day going?”

“Good. My host kid is sleeping now, so I can have some rest, thank God,” she said dramatically while Franziska laughed. “And my counselor sent

me an email saying that another au pair is coming this week. She'll live three blocks away."

"Really?" Franziska attempted to seem interested. She couldn't even remember the last time she had talked to her own Local Childcare Consultant. Since she had a great host family, she didn't see the need to contact her. To be honest, her LCC didn't really take her job seriously anyway.

"Yeah, her name is Shana or something; she's French."

"That sounds cool."

"Yeah, we'll see ... by the way, I saw your profile picture and I love the new hair color. You look just like a redheaded version of Dita Von Teese."

"See!"

Franziska silenced herself and lowered her voice, thinking she might have spoken a little too loudly.

"Everyone except Connor told me the same thing; he looked at me as if I disgusted him."

And the conversation was back to the one and only ...

"Are you serious?" Karolina yelled, and Franziska could picture her widening her eyes as she always did when she told her about Connor's latest strange behavior.

"Yeah, he told me I was overdressed."

"What?"

"I swear! And then he started to be dista—"

"Franny! Franny! FRANZISKA," she heard from the living room.

Her host kids! She had almost forgotten about them. She realized that she'd been *peeing* for over ten minutes and her stomach twisted at the thought of what her host parents would say if they knew.

"*Scheiße!*" she swore under her breath. "I'll call you back, Kare." She hung up and yelled, "What, Emily?"

"Ethan broke my doll!"

"Ugh! Ethan! Ethan!" Franziska opened the bathroom door and headed toward the living room where she found her two little host kids.

"Yes, Franny?" Ethan was dragging his feet with a guilty look on his little cherub face.

"Is it true?" she asked cautiously, trying to control herself. His lack of response confirmed that he had done it. "How many times do I have to remind you to stop making your sister cry? Just because you're twins and share almost everything doesn't mean you shouldn't respect her toys!"

"But she called me a fat boy!"

"That's not true," Emily interrupted.

"Yes, you did, you even called me *bum bum*."

“Oh God, here we go again.” Franziska rolled her eyes and before she knew it, the kids had started fighting again. It was always the same thing. She secretly hoped she would never have twins—maybe one or two kids would be fine but definitely not at the same time.

“Stop it, guys.” She separated them. “Okay, what’s *bum bum*?”

The twins stopped their fighting as they exchanged looks before bursting into laughter. Franziska figured it wasn’t much different from what “bum” meant by itself.

“Okay, I don’t wanna know. Now you guys are going to watch TV while I make your snacks, and if I hear you fighting again, I swear, no TV for a week.”

“Okay, okay!” they answered in unison.

Franziska turned the TV to the Disney Channel before heading to the restroom next to the kitchen. She pulled her phone out of her pocket, determined to finish her conversation with Karolina. She began her story again, explaining how Connor had ignored her, whispering the whole time so her host kids didn’t hear. After five minutes, Karolina told her not to worry about it.

“Maybe it’s just a cultural difference,” she said as if that would make all of Franziska’s anxiety disappear.

“Fraaaaaaan!” Ethan yelled from the living room, interrupting her conversation.

“Yeah, kiddo?”

“Are the snacks ready yet?!”

“Almost, just give me one second!” she yelled back.

“Okay, Kare, I think I’d better call you back. Talk to you later,” she whispered before hanging up. She discovered Ethan right in front of the door and froze when she opened it. “Geez, you scared me.”

“I thought you were making our snacks.”

“I was ... I ... it’s just that I needed to pee, Mr. Know-It-All.”

“Where is my snack, then?”

Franziska sighed and knelt down. “Just give me five minutes and you’ll have it, okay?”

“Okay.”

She poured some goldfish onto two little plates, replaying the conversation with Karolina in her head. When a misunderstanding was mixed with alcohol and other things, it never ended well.

“Fran!”

Prince Ethan calling again.

“Ethan! I’m coming!” she yelled back, making her way to the living room with two plates of carrots and goldfish crackers.

“You really need to work on your patience, because I will not tolerate this kind of attitude anymore. Okay?” Franziska continued, as she removed toys from the kids’ table to make room for the snacks.

“But what took you so long?” he asked innocently, ignoring Franziska’s comment.

Smart boy! She couldn’t win with him, just like she couldn’t win with Connor. *Am I a weak person?*

“Ethan, the discussion is not over. I’ll go clean the kitchen, and I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Okay,” he said, a sad look crossing his face for a few seconds before he focused all of his attention on the TV again. Franziska just wanted to laugh. For sure, Ethan would become a great actor.

As soon as she entered the kitchen, Franziska’s thoughts drifted back to Connor while she looked at her phone. Nothing! No missed phone calls, no messages, no Facebook notifications, nothing from him. He usually called her several times a day or texted her while she was working, but since the fight at the party, he hadn’t tried to contact her at all. Despite trying to hide it, it affected her a lot, especially being so far away from her family and friends back home.

She decided to check Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and everything she could think of to see if he’d been active at all. She discovered the last time he had updated his Facebook was three months ago. Unlike most people his age, Connor wasn’t really into social media. He wasn’t like his best friend, Gavin Roth, who had more than five million followers on Instagram. As she continued to browse online, she couldn’t see anything of Connor, just tons of pictures of Gavin. Gavin in his car, Gavin at a party, Gavin with a new girl, Gavin at the gym, etc.

“Fuck,” she muttered. Maybe she should put her pride aside and reach out to him. Not seeing any activity since the party was driving her insane. A few hours ago, all she had wanted to do was to forget about him, but now she felt she would give almost anything to hear from him.

! 3 MESSAGES!

***WARNING:** You may find mistakes in the following stories as they were sent by non-native English speakers. For the sake of authenticity, the messages have not been altered.

#AUPAIRCHRONICLES: *Dear APC admin, last night I went out with my friend and her host mother.*

The host mom was paying for all the drinks, strong drinks and bombs, when I realized she was flirting with me. My friend and I got super drunk and her host mom ordered an Uber. My friend was so drunk she passed out minutes after entering the car; that's when her host mom started kissing me and touching me. I'm an open lesbian but it's way different making out with your friend's boss/roommate/ host mom than meeting a girl in a bar. I knew it wasn't okay but I was too drunk and went with the moment. When we arrived in the house I tucked my friend in her bed and was going to sleep with her but her host mom came in. Last thing I remember was going to her room, kissing her and then passing out in her bed. I woke up naked this morning before my friend or host mom did, got dressed and called an Uber. I haven't talked with my friend yet, I don't know if I should tell her. My best friend's host mom likes to party a lot. My best friend and her get along amazingly and go out a lot together. They party really hard. At the beginning, I used to go out with them all the time, but they are always doing hard drugs and meeting weird people.

#AUPAIRCHRONICLES: *Hey APC, So I'm flying home soon and I watched my kids overnight. One of my host kids, L. (3.yo.), was sitting on my bed and "helping" me pack... She started talking about my kids back home, even though I don't have any yet, 'obvi.' 😂 So she asked me : L: Are your kids waiting for you? Who's taking care of them while you're here? Me: I don't have any kids yet, I'm too young and I don't have a husband yet. Answer from L: But you've me and A. (her little sister)! We're your kids! I'll never forget that. I miss them already!*

#AUPAIRCHRONICLES: *Guess what? My host mom confessed something to me: she hates her life, her kids, her husband...I didn't know how to react as she started to cry. So awkward.*

Sanaa's Head in the Clouds

Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris.

"I am sorry, but that is not possible!" the stewardess confirmed as she began raising her voice.

"But M-"

"However-" she cut Nael off, "I can change your ticket. There is another flight to New York leaving at 10:25 this morning."

Sanaa and Nael were ecstatic with the news, and both profusely thanked the stewardesses, one of whom interrupted them.

"You are very lucky that you are not being charged for your next flight! You should plan your travels accordingly next time."

"Yes, Miss, we really are aware of that, thanks again!" Sanaa gushed with her most beautiful smile, giving her one more *thank you* look. Then, Sanaa and her brother frantically gathered her bags and found the gate for the next flight.

"Nael, you're the best! It's all thanks to you." She smiled, regretting having called him names earlier.

"Anytime, little sis!" he said, winking at her.

"Little sis? How many times do I have to remind you that I am your older sister?"

"Yeah, yeah, if you say so! Listen, Sanaa," he started to say with a serious face, stopping in front of the check-in service. "You need to be confident! What are you gonna do in America if you are in trouble? Seriously, believe in yourself, and don't forget that anything is possible. Okay?"

She rolled her eyes, feeling awkward after his emotional speech.

"Anyway, enough with the heavy stuff. It's time for me to leave. Come here!" He grabbed his sister tightly, enveloping her in a hug. It was an unusual exchange as they normally spent more time fighting and arguing than showing affection, but at the moment, it was the most comforting thing in the world, and Sanaa had to fight the urge to break down in the middle of the airport.

"Okay! Enough with the PDA! It's not like I'm never coming back! I'll call you as soon as I get there, anyway. Bye, big head!" Sanaa smiled one last time at her brother as she watched him walk away. "It better not get bigger while I'm gone!" she yelled as he turned around.

“And you better not come back obese! I know how obsessed you are with American cupcakes!”

Sanaa laughed as people started to stare at them.

“Sanaa,” he called one last time.

“Arrrh! What now?” she yelled in an exaggerated, annoyed tone, not wanting to show the tears that were threatening to pour. Thank God when she turned around, she realized that he was too far off to notice.

“I was kidding earlier. Your host family will be lucky to have you. Have a safe flight, sister.”

A grateful smile spread across her face, and she realized how much she would miss him. *Why are my eyes watering so much right now?* When he was totally out of view, she gathered herself and then lingered around the check-in service. Silence! As noisy as the airport actually was, all she could hear was silence and her increasing heartbeat. Loneliness and isolation took over. *I can't believe that I won't see him for a whole year ... mom neither.*

Sanaa had always been the type of girl who could easily get a job in her small town and make a life for herself there. But, despite the fact that she had a good life, she had always felt slightly out of place in Turenne. When she tried voicing this with friends or family, they always told her that she was too complicated, to which she replied that she was just ambitious. People would laugh, saying she needed to come back down to earth because she wasn't Beyonce. These comments would make her clench her teeth. No wonder why she was a huge fan of *Glee*, as she could totally see herself in Rachel Berry's character. At least Rachel had made it to Broadway. But what about Sanaa? After seeing countless characters in TV shows evolve and realize their dreams, she had needed to take control of her own life. The thing she hadn't thought about was the fact that her family wouldn't be there to help. She was all by herself now.

Her mind wandered to her future host family. *Did I make the right decision? Did I choose the right family and the right city?* Sanaa had no idea what this year would offer her, but at least she was finally ready for her flight. What would her agency say if she missed another one? Panic flooded her mind! She had forgotten to tell them about her flight update! *Oh shit! Nobody knows I've missed my flight. Sanaa, calm down! Breathe! It's gonna be okay!*

She had canceled her cell phone plan two days before, so there was no way she could call the U.S. right now, but she realized she had a few Euros in her coat pocket which would be enough to use a pay phone to call the agency in America. She picked up the receiver and looked baffled. *How the hell does this thing work? I haven't used one of these things in years!* She dialed and waited impatiently for the ring. *Come on! Pick up! Pick up! Please!*

“Sweet Care Au Pair, Heather speaking!” a warm female voice sang.

“Hi ... euh ... mah nem is Sanaa ... I am eh future au pair,” Sanaa stammered in her strong French accent.

“I was soopposed to take ... I mean a flight, but I meest it so I will be at ze airport toomorrow at twenty-one euh, ah mean 9:00 P.M.”

“Okay, Sanaa, which airport?”

“Eh, New York JFK Unternhasionhal Airport. I’m cooming from Paris and my flight number is BA926.”

“Perfect!” The lady sounded satisfied.

Did she really understand what I just said?

“Don’t worry, Sanaa, you’re not the only one! Other au pairs are coming at the same time.”

“Oh reellee?” This calmed Sanaa’s nerves.

“Yes! Are you okay? Is everything going well?”

“Yes, fank you.”

“Alright then. We’ll wait for you, Sanaa, and at 9 P.M., we’ll pick you up.”

“Fank you very much again.”

“You’re welcome. Have a safe trip, Sanaa. Goodbye.”

Sanaa hung up feeling satisfied. She was relieved to know that things were starting to go her way, though she would have to work on her English accent. She found a seat next to the check-in desk and set her bags down on the floor. There was nothing to do but wait. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, in Washington D.C. to be exact, someone was not very happy at the prospect of having a new au pair ...

Washington, D.C., the Baker family’s home.

“Only a few days and our new au pair will be here!” April Baker beamed at her son and husband as she set the table for dinner. “Aren’t you excited, Toby?”

“NO! Not at all!” The little boy glared at his mom.

“Toby,” his dad intervened, and the boy lowered his head.

“Listen,” his mother started. “You promised you’ll be nice.”

“But I don’t want a new au pair.”

“Toby, we’ve already talked about it. Sanaa will be your new au pair and you better behave nicely when she gets here, okay?”

Toby frowned, his eyes almost squinting in anger as he finally barked back sharply, “YES!”

His mom knew that his retort was the farthest thing from sincere.

Eight-year-old Toby was not ready to change his mind. He wasn’t sure he had a choice in the matter, but as he crossed his arms, one certainty entered his mind: *She might become my new au pair, but it doesn’t mean she’ll last long.*

A Couch of Lies

Downtown D.C., Connor's apartment, 7:00 P.M.

Franziska was standing outside Connor's apartment. She had rushed out of her house thirty minutes before when her host parents returned home, and she hadn't had time to freshen up her make-up before leaving. She reached for her iPhone and switched to the front-facing camera to take one last look at herself. She didn't feel very well put-together, so she ran her fingers through her hair to add some volume and make it wavier, the way Connor liked it. She finally got up the courage to knock and quickly heard Connor's answer.

"Who's there?"

"Erm ..." She hesitated before shouting with her naturally husky voice, "It's me, Fran!" There was a moment of silence, and she could hear her heart beating in her chest. Why was she so nervous? Maybe because the last time she saw Connor, he had seemed to completely forget about her existence. She heard footsteps making their way toward the door. She took a deep breath, straightened her posture and readied herself before the door opened.

"Hi!" Franziska said, trying to smile despite the frosty look on Connor's face. He looked totally out of sorts and disheveled, wearing a white tank top and black boxers. The grogginess in his eyes made it obvious that he had just woken up. *At 7 P.M.?*

"What's up," he snapped, his arms crossed.

Franziska's hands were clammy, and she trembled as she summoned up the courage to not run away.

"Can I come in?" she asked, hesitating.

Connor sighed, but Franziska took it as a *yes* and moved past him. His huge living room was a mess. It was cold and dark, but Franziska could see empty bottles and clothes strewn everywhere. Connor didn't move to switch on the light so Franziska did; the place looked even dirtier when illuminated. This wasn't out of the ordinary after a party, but usually, his cleaners came after everyone was gone and made the place fit for the standards of well-off D.C. residents.

"Are your cleaners on holiday?"

Franziska tried to lighten the mood, but his expression told her he wasn't up for jokes. He didn't even look at her. It felt like she was invisible, reminding her of how people ignored her back home. They acted as if she wasn't interesting or beautiful, and to be honest, after a long time she started to believe them. But when she arrived in America, she met him, the guy who'd looked at her like no one else had, as if she not only existed but also mattered and had meaning on this earth. Even if he could be unpredictable sometimes, she needed to try to fix things between them. Franziska cleared her throat and spoke again.

"Nothing happened with Dean, you know."

"Do I look like I care?"

He smirked, turning on the TV. He clearly didn't want her to stay, but she was determined to work it out, so she followed him to the couch. The coffee table was cluttered with empty imported beer bottles, cigarettes and other party favors.

"I know you don't believe me, but that's the truth."

"Damn right, Franziska, I don't believe you."

Hearing him use her full name showed just how mad he was.

"Listen, Connor, I need to tell you something. Can you please turn the TV off?"

Connor didn't blink as he stared at the TV. An old episode of *Sons of Anarchy* was playing, and Franziska instantly remembered the first time she had heard about this TV show. It was a few months ago; Connor had invited her over, and they had spent the whole night having sex, watching episodes on Netflix, drinking and smoking. She had felt so free that night but most of all, so like herself ...

"Con?" Franziska moved closer to him, grabbed the remote and pointed it to the TV to switch it off.

Connor's eyes turned dark and Franziska swallowed hard. Her hands were clammy all over again, like they always were when her anxiety took control. What she needed now was to open her heart to him, and hopefully things would go back to normal like they had been when they were happy, when her au pair adventure was a fairy tale and when the sky was always blue and every color seemed more vibrant just because of him.

"I know I was acting immature but you were really rude to me and-"

"Hold on, I was rude to you? You left my party and hooked up with Dean fucking Ev-"

"For God's sake, Connor, I didn't do anything!" she yelled, surprised when Connor stayed quiet. "He dropped me off at my host parents' place and left."

He stood, trying to control his anger, before walking up to her, his expression hard. "Then prove it."

She frowned and he added, "Call him."

Franziska didn't hesitate as she took her phone out of her pocket. She had allowed Dean to give her his number that night because although she knew she wouldn't see him again, she hadn't felt like completely rejecting him. Connor suddenly had a smug look on his face which she caught instantly.

"So, you do have his number, huh? And you want to make me believe that nothing happened?" He cringed, his tone full of sarcasm.

Why does he always have to be like that? Always assuming things?

"That's it, I'm done! I'm not gonna try to fix this! I don't even know why I came here in the first place"

"Me neither."

"You're such a bastard, you know! We wouldn't be in this situation if you hadn't ignored me in the first place."

"Not that again." He rubbed his eyes as if he was getting a headache.

"That's the truth, you ignored me because you were ashamed of me, ashamed 'cause I'm not like the skinny type of girls you used to fuck! The only thing you like about me is the fact that I'm foreign which means I'm exotic." She waved her hands in frustration. "Don't you think I'm aware of that?"

The tears she had promised she wouldn't let fall were rolling down her cheeks, taking her makeup with them and turning her into a raccoon-eyed mess. She didn't want him to see her like this but it was too late now, and she supposed her heart had opened more than she had planned. She felt so weak that all she could think of doing was leaving, but as she turned away, Connor surprised her by putting a hand on her arm. As she looked back at him, his expression was soft and reminded her of all the other times he had looked at her with love.

"I'm not ashamed of you ... I'm ... I'm ..." He sighed while he ran his hand through his light brown hair. "Listen, I never wanted to disrespect you, and I didn't want to be distant, it's just ..." He shook his head, unable to gather his thoughts. He wished he could be honest with her and explain how the new hair color and pin-up dress she had worn that night had opened some deep wounds from his past. He decided that lying would be his best option because she wouldn't understand.

"I don't know ... I didn't realize you felt so neglected. I promise it won't happen again." He took her hand in his.

Feeling his fingers intertwined with hers made her heart pound blissfully. Franziska could feel his regret for how he had acted as he rubbed her cheek with his thumb before kissing her deeply. Their emotions raw, they kissed like they were each other's source of oxygen, like he hadn't realized that he had missed her so badly. But then the memories from two days ago flashed through his mind. Robyn lying naked on his couch, underneath his hot and sweaty body, him filled with resentment for Franziska and the dark

place he felt she had made him return to. Now, the guilt of what he had done made him break off the kiss suddenly and put a hand on his girlfriend's shoulder.

"What's the matter?" Franziska frowned.

He looked at her, distracted and somewhat nervous.

"Are you okay?" she asked when he didn't answer.

"Yeah! I am. It's just ... I, um ..." He swallowed hard. He seemed unable to gather his thoughts nor to get the right words out. As he looked deep into those brown eyes of hers, he knew that he couldn't hurt her more than he already had. She didn't deserve it. "I love you, Fran."

Her face lit up, and she fought to control herself from bursting with pure joy. Without saying anything, she kissed him tenderly. The kiss heated up quickly, and as Connor took control, Franziska let passion overtake her. He lay her down, pushing aside memories of Robyn under him on the same couch less than forty-eight hours ago.

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