

Any resemblance between some of the characters in this story and my family members is purely a coincidence.

Just a Job

“Well, let’s see ... size fourteen, was that what you said?”

“No.” Frostily. “I didn’t say. And it’s a size eleven, thank you very much!”

“Oops, sorry. Well have a look at this rack here ...”

It was Emily’s first week at her new job, and so far it wasn’t going very well. For lots of reasons. She needed this job to pay for her living expenses; it would be almost a year before she could get into college.

You would think that a job as a sales clerk at a fashionable clothing store for women would be a piece of cake, after some of the jobs she’d had recently. At least, that’s what she’d told herself. And Jesse had agreed.

“You wear such nice clothes” Jesse had told her. “You’ll be good at helping women find what they want!”

“Well, I guess so,” Emily had replied, rather uncertainly. “But it’s the customers. They’re so ... rude! And I’m always saying the wrong thing!”

Cole spoke up from the couch where he was engrossed in a game of Warhammer. “I think you should join the Canadian Forces! You’d make a great drill sergeant!”

Cole was joking. At least, Emily was pretty sure he was. Last week he’d suggested she might want to get a job at Pizza Deluxe. She thought he was just contemplating the leftover pizzas she might bring home.

“I’ll just stick it out at the clothing store, thanks. But I wish the customers weren’t so ... unpleasant, sometimes!”

She’d discovered that in her first few days on the job.

“Do you think these slacks make me look slimmer?” A woman had just come out of the change room and was asking Emily her opinion about some clothing the woman had selected. The woman was about five feet tall ... and almost as wide.

“Umm ...” Emily wasn’t sure what to say. In fact, the pants seemed to be about three sizes too small. She wondered how the woman had ever managed to get them on.

“How much were they? Just a minute ... I dropped the price tag.” She bent over.

“Uh ... maybe you shouldn't ...” But it was too late. The sound of fabric ripping could be heard all over the store.

“I think you might want to try the next size up. Or maybe two sizes ...” Emily was trying to be diplomatic.

“That's OK. I didn't like the colour anyway” the woman stated without embarrassment, as she retreated to the change room.

Emily looked around, wondering what to do next. She was straightening some clothing on a rack when the woman reappeared. She tossed the slacks on the floor. “You really ought to do something about that change room. It reeks in there!” Without so much as a glance back, she left the store.

Emily stuck her head into the change room. It did smell bad. As she was turning around, the store's other salesgirl, Samantha, came up beside her.

“Hi, Emily. Like, what are you doing for lunch? Wanna go to McDonald's with me?” She managed to say this while popping her gum at the same time.

She looked into the change room too. “Ewww. Gross! Who, like, died in here?”

“I think it was that lady who was in here about half an hour ago, the one with the baby” Emily said. “She didn't buy the blouse she was trying on. In fact, it was still on the hanger when she came out. I think she just went in there to change the baby's diaper!”

Both Emily and Samantha looked into the change room again. Sure enough, there was a dirty diaper stuffed under the bench.

“Yuk! I'm not touching that!” Samantha turned and scurried away.

Sighing, Emily bent to retrieve the offending item, which she carefully deposited in a trash can just outside the front entrance.

Back inside the store, she noticed a customer looking at bathing suits along the side wall. She went over to help. It was a man.

“Hi. Can I help you? You know this is a woman's clothing store, right?”

“Uh ... sure. I need to buy something for my wife. It's her birthday.” He looked embarrassed.

“OK. What did you have in mind?”

“Ummm ... I'm not sure.”

“I noticed you looking at the bathing suits ...”

“No I wasn’t!” He turned red. “I was just ... thinking what to get her!”

Emily thought for a moment. “Well, what would you like to look at? Dresses? Blouses? Slacks? Undergarments?”

“Uh ... OK.”

Emily led him to a rack of blouses. “Do you know what size she is?”

“Size?” He looked flustered. “No, I don’t think so ...”

“Well, is she shorter than you, or taller?” The man himself couldn’t be more than five and a half feet tall. Emily towered over him.

“She’s about my height. Only shorter. I think.”

He was definitely flustered.

Emily tried another tack. “Well, do you know her bra size? That might help.”

“Her what?? No, I ... What?” He was turning red again. “Maybe this was a mistake. I’ll just ...” He was still mumbling to himself as he hurriedly left the store.

“Well, Emily, there’s another customer you’ve scared off!” It was Samantha. She laughed. “Just kidding!”

Emily didn’t much like Samantha. Maybe it was the three large rings that hung from piercings in her lower lip. Or it might have been the way she was constantly chewing gum and popping bubbles. In any case, Samantha could sometimes be pretty unpleasant.

The rest of the week hadn’t gone much better. On Wednesday, a woman had brought her teenage daughter in to look for some ‘back-to-school’ clothes. Unfortunately what the woman had wanted in the way of clothing for her daughter was not what the daughter wanted.

“Look, Mom! Isn’t this, like, the most amazing outfit? I love it!”

The daughter had emerged from the change room wearing a very short skirt, and an extremely low-cut blouse that left very little to the imagination.

The mother looked her up and down, and said, rather forcefully “No daughter of mine is going to school in that outfit! It’s disgraceful. And it doesn’t fit. Don’t you agree?” She turned to Emily.

“Well, ... it does look pretty good on her ...”

“What? You’re taking her side? I might have known!” She fumed while the daughter returned to the change room to remove the offending articles of clothing. It didn’t take long.

“Let’s go, we’re getting out of here!” And she wasted no time in dragging her daughter out of the store.

Thursday hadn’t been much better.

A rather large lady approached the till, where Emily was sorting some blouses.

“I need some shoes. Brown leather, with half-inch heels.”

“We don’t sell shoes, ma’am.”

“And not that fake plastic stuff. I want real leather.”

“Uh ... I’m sorry. We don’t sell shoes.”

“What do you mean, you don’t sell shoes. Of course you sell shoes. I bought some here last month!”

“I don’t think ...”

“Are you going to sell me some shoes, or aren’t you!”

“We don’t sell shoes, ma’am. But we have a sale on this week ... all our jeans are ...”

“I don’t like your attitude, young lady. I want to speak to the manager!”

“Sure. Just a moment.” Emily went to the back of the store. The manager was not in the store very often, but she figured that this was one customer that Samantha maybe deserved.

“Samantha, there’s a customer out front who would like your help. I think she’s looking for underwear. I have to go to the bathroom.” Let Samantha deal with it.

When Emily returned to the sales floor, Samantha greeted her with a smile. “That went, like, pretty well. I sold her two pairs of slacks and a blouse. She left pretty happy.”

“What?? How did you ... I mean, wasn’t she looking for shoes? How ...?”

“Yeah, she thought we sold shoes. Dumb broad. I ignored that, and told her that she’d look really good in some of the new stuff we just got in. I gave her a ten percent discount.”

“Ten percent? I thought we were offering fifteen percent?”

“Yeah, but she didn’t know that. The tags aren’t on. So it’s not official, like.”

Emily decided she might be able to learn something from Samantha after all.

Friday had gone smoothly until almost closing time, when a short, mousy-looking woman with stringy blonde hair had come into the store with her five children. She looked harried.

“You kids be good now. Mommy is going to try on some jeans.”

Mommy did in fact try on some jeans. And then another pair. And then four or five more. Meanwhile, her kids seemed to be playing hide-and-seek between the clothes racks. One of them was eating an ice cream cone. Emily tried to run interference, between trips back to the rack to bring the woman more pairs to try on.

“Don’t do that!” One of the kids, an obnoxious-looking four-year-old, was pulling blouses off the hangars and dropping them on the floor. Emily quickly picked them up and returned them to the rack.

The kid with the ice cream cone had put it down on a pile of sweaters, and was methodically removing bras from their boxes and tying them together.

“Hey, stop that!”

But before she could do anything about it, two of the other kids ran screaming down the aisle. They were being chased by the fifth child, a small pudgy girl with a runny nose who was waving an arm from one of the store’s mannequins in the air.

Emily was about to chase after them when the mother emerged from the change room. “I’m sorry. I don’t like any of these.” She dropped the pile of jeans at Emily’s feet. “Let’s go, kids! Stop fooling around. Jared, get that brassiere off your head ... you look silly! Come on, let’s go!”

Emily watched them exit the store. She was quick to lock the door behind them. Samantha and she would have to clean up the mess before turning out the lights and leaving.

Samantha emerged from the back room. She had her coat on and her purse over her arm. “You can lock up tonight, can’t you, Em?” She popped her gum. “I have to leave.

My boyfriend's like, taking me to the Monster Car Demolition Derby, and I'm already late. Lock the door behind me, OK?" And she was gone.

Emily surveyed the mess and sighed.

The next day she told Jesse all about her week.

Jesse commiserated with her. "I doesn't sound like you had a good time. But you survived. Did you make any sales?"

"Yeah, quite a few, actually. It's a good store, and some of the customers are nice. I just wish all of them were."

"Well ..." Jesse had a small smile on her face. "Maybe you should consider retail sales as a career ..."

"Are you crazy? After the past week, I can't wait to start college next year! I was thinking maybe forensics ... or possibly palaeontology. But wait, radiology sounds interesting. Or maybe I could get into fashion design ..."

Jesse just sighed.