

Missing From The Picture

By Minisino, Redhawk, and Buttercup

Challenges:

Characters: (movieverse) Peter Parker, Emma Frost

Activity: Changing a diaper

Peter stared at the ruined remains of the silverware drawer in his hand. His first thought was, "MJ is going to kill me." His second thought was, "Crap. Knives. Baby!" Using the spectacular agility that was his hallmark as the Amazing Spider-Man, he shot a wad of webbing at the good steak knives, hoping that the webbing wouldn't gum them up too badly. The webbing cocooned the knives just before his daughter, May, giggling and drooling, could impale herself on the sharp edges. "One problem solved. Come here, kiddo, Daddy needs to collect all the shinys before Mommy removes Daddy's gonads with a spoon," he told his daughter, who looked up at him and smiled radiantly. "Shiny!" she said. "Shiny," he agreed solemnly, then set the drawer on the table and bent down to collect the errant silverware.

"What was *that*?" asked Mary Jane Watson-Parker, light of Peter's life, as she stood in the doorway and wagged a rolled-up script at her husband. "Why are you holding our silverware drawer, and why is there webbing on the floor? I've *TOLD* you about the webbing thing in the house . . ."

Peter smiled at his wife, a clever move ruined by the wrecked silverware drawer that was taunting him from the kitchen table. "The drawer was stuck," he confessed. "Silverware fall down, go boom."

To his immense disappointment, she didn't find his description even slightly amusing. It was to be expected, he thought, given the absolutely insane amounts of stress that MJ had been under for the last . . . well, for a very long time, really. "I've almost got all of it, and after this, May and I are gonna make absolutely no noise for the rest of the night, so you can rehearse."

MJ didn't quite smile, but her features softened a little, and Peter knew she wasn't so much angry as frustrated. Everyone was frustrated lately, trying to raise a baby, pay the rent and save the world.

As if conjured by that thought, sirens began going off. Peter's head swivelled like a springer spaniel on point. "No --" she began, but he was already doffing his shirt.

"Gotta go, hon." And he was out the window over the sink.

"Dammit!"

"Mommy?"

Mary Jane knelt down to retrieve her daughter, propping her on a hip. "Sorry, honey. Daddy disappeared again." She stared in dismay at the random webbing spread over her floor and the silverware scattered like pick-up-sticks. May was already wriggling out of her grasp. "You're going in the playpen," Mary Jane said, tossing the script on the counter with a slap.

Child stowed, Mary Jane came back into the kitchen to repair the damage even as Peter was . . . somewhere . . . repairing something else.

An hour and one clean kitchen later, May struggled a bit as she was strapped into her booster

chair, which served many purposes -- such as keeping her from obliterating the apartment and providing Mary Jane with the perfect audience while she rehearsed for her audition. Peter was -- surprise, surprise -- still not home.

Once May was buckled up in her chair, MJ returned to her script, eyeing it for a minute or two before she started.

"Oh, man. This really stinks." Frowning as soon as the words left her mouth, MJ sighed.

"Oh, man!" she repeated. "This really stinks."

It was a little better that time, but her delivery was still wrong.

She turned suddenly to face May. "Oh, man. This *really* stinks!"

May, far from being impressed by this display of raw emotion, blew a raspberry at Mary Jane who, frankly, took it a little personally.

She paced a few times, stopped, glanced back at the baby, and sighed. It made sense for her to watch May because she was *HERE*, and Peter obviously wasn't, but it seemed more and more impossible to concentrate on anything other than the awkward noises coming from May. She hated feeling bitter. It wasn't as though Mary Jane hadn't been aware of Peter's pressing schedule when she married him, and she knew he tried, almost too hard. But bitter was really the only word to explain how she felt as she sat, exhausted on the couch, dropped her script and put her head in her hands.

May wasn't yet old enough to be left alone in the tub, so Mary Jane was kneeling on the bath rug when the phone rang. "Peter!"

No one replied, and the phone rang again. "Dammit," she muttered. Clearly Peter wasn't here again. Grabbing May and a towel, she wrapped the child as she exploded out of the bathroom to grab the wall phone in the kitchen. "Hello?"
A pause, "Is Mary Jane Watson there?"

"This is her. I mean, speaking." Mary Jane shifted the baby and propped the phone on her shoulder.

"This is James Boddington, with Plan 9 Studios, we wanted to schedule a callback for the part of Dazzler's friend, Tiffany."

"What? I mean, really? Oh, my God!" And then the phone slipped off her shoulder to clatter on the linoleum floor, to May's vast amusement. Mary Jane almost cried. "When is this going to end?" she asked the ceiling before snatching up the phone again.

The trouble was, she didn't know if she'd like the answer to her question.

The Green Room wasn't green and Mary Jane wondered why the name couldn't be properly reflected in the decor. The walls *might* have been white once, but a combination of age and cigarette smoke had turned them eggshell. Mary Jane was trying to move away from one of the assistant producers who seemed to be a little too interested in her cleavage and had the breath of a cat who'd eaten rotten fish. Unfortunately, that backed her up within reach of an aging starlet in a nearly-see-through sheath dress (some things should be illegal on some people) who was equally interested in Mary Jane's cleavage. MJ shot her husband a desperate glance, but wrapped up in handling May, he was oblivious to her straits.

A shout from somewhere in the center of a crowd slowly silenced the scattered islands of pointless conversation. "The cars have arrived. Let's head to the Sheraton." Like cattle down a chute, the cast and crew moved out. The word 'cars' had made Mary Jane expect limos. What she got instead was a blue studio bus-cum-school-bus, and one of her spike heels caught on a torn rubber stair pad. Peter had to grab her to keep her from falling onto her ass on the concrete. "Up you go," he said, one hand against the small of her back while the other held May.

They took their (bench) seats and once everyone was there, the bus lurched into movement. The producer got a limo, Mary Jane noticed, as did the Dazzler -- the privileges of stardom, however B-grade. Ten minutes later, they were pulling into the Sheraton and Mary Jane's French twist was falling out of its pins. She blew a strand of hair from her face. "Where's the air conditioning?" she muttered aloud.

As they were exiting, the familiar (and dreaded) sound of sirens pierced the night air. Spinning around, she had Peter by the wrist before he could even move. "Not tonight. Please, Peter. Not tonight."

"Sorry, babe. Great power, great responsibility -- you know the drill," he said with an apologetic look before handing May back to MJ. "They need me." Then he ducked around the corner into an alley, and she saw him actually remember to unbutton his dress shirt as he climbed the wall of the alley towards the roof of the hotel. It was a sign of her exhaustion that she was absurdly pleased by the fact he didn't pop his buttons.

Sighing, MJ mustered up a tired smile for her daughter, then headed inside the hotel to join the other cast members. In this, at least, the studio had spared little expense. Gleaming crystal, fine china, and a small horde of attractively-tuxedo'ed wait staff served their every whim. One of the phalanx of servers moved up to Mary Jane and motioned her towards one of the tables. She followed along obediently, carrying her daughter and absently pulling errant strands of her hairdo out of her daughter's mouth.

The dinner itself was fabulous -- a far cry from the Hungry Man and endless iterations of salad that had become their normal diet since May had been born -- and May herself spent most of the dinner being an absolute angel, which Mary Jane thought must be Divine Compensation for the Ever-Disappearing Husband. The grace period was all-too-brief, unfortunately, as the truly distressing amount of grapes May had consumed registered finally with MJ thanks to a familiar expression -- the one that said, 'Mommy, I'm going to do something you'll really regret unless you go change me Right Now.' Then there was The Smell, one Mary Jane knew all too well.

Gathering up her daughter, MJ smiled charmingly at the Dazzler, the producers, and the director, then excused herself to go to the ladies' room.

The bathroom was as large as the apartment she shared with Peter, with a green marble counter top, designer soap dispensers and hand towels on bronze towel racks. But there was no handy white plastic Koala Changing Station. In fact, as near as Mary Jane could tell, there was no place to change a diaper at all. Clearly this hotel was Not Child Friendly. At a loss, she grabbed the changing pad out of the diaper bag and slapped it on the marble counter near the make-up mirror, fresh Huggies beside it, and wipes, then she laid May on the pad, pulling down the little white tights (with no brown stains, thank God) and undid the diapers. Sliding them free, she folded the diaper edges over the rather runny diarrhea inside and secured the tape, all one-handed, May's ankles gripped in the other, lifting her dirty fanny off the pad. Then she used wipes to clean the mess and slid the fresh diaper under her, letting her bottom down. With one hand on May's tummy to keep her from rolling, she reached for another wipe when It Happened. 'It' being the nightmare of parents everywhere.

With an expression of great concentration and a noise that sounded more like a burp than anything, a second bowel movement interrupted the changing. Unfortunately, it wasn't of the normal type. No, it was of the projectile type, and Mary Jane had only a moment to leap back out of the way.

Yellow-green shit exploded all over the marble counter. All over the wallpapered wall. All over the clean mirror. All over the bulb lights. It was pure poop scattershot.

At that very moment, the door opened and an elegant woman entered. The door was distressingly close to the makeup mirror and she'd turned right as she walked in so that splatters of yellow-green sprayed the front of her expensive, sequined dress. Her very WHITE dress.

She didn't say anything verbal but her face was loud in its expression of shock.

"Oh, my God, oh, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, it was the grapes. She had too many grapes. They went right through her."

The woman (whose hair -- and now face -- was almost as white as her dress), simply *stared*. Hard. "This is a Dior. Your little brat just shat all over my Dior."

"I'm sorry, I don't --"

"Just shut *up*, you disgusting little breeder."

The woman's white face was slowly shading to scarlet as she swept past Mary Jane, digging in her handbag for a cell phone and flipping it open to punch in a number, practically shouting into the receiver, "Sebastian! I need the driver *now*." Then she locked herself up in a stall and Mary Jane could hear her still talking as MJ began the ugly process of cleaning up, her face as red as her hair.

"Peter, we're going to have a talk when you get home," she muttered through the tears of humiliation.

Two hours later, with (a clean) May safely asleep, the bedroom door slammed open and Mary Jane stalked through. "PETER!" she bellowed, fists clenched into fists. "We are going to have a talk. Right now. I don't care if Doctor Doom knocks on that door and asks very nicely if Spider-Man can come out and play. I don't care if the city catches fire, or if Galactus decides to learn the Macarena. We. Are. Going. To. Talk."

Peter -- no fool -- immediately sat up and did his absolute best to project sincere attention. "Sure thing, hon," he told her in as soothing a manner as he could muster. "I take it you're upset about something?" As soon as the words escaped his lips, Peter wished he could take them back. He was fairly sure that no human woman's blood pressure should ever go that high, and the shade of red that she turned was unmatched in nature.

"You . . . *you* . . . *YOU!*" she screamed at him, shaking her fist. "You are IMPOSSIBLE! You're never here, you run off to go save the world and leave me with the baby, and earlier our darling daughter shit all over the ballroom bathroom and *my career!*"

Peter winced, and made a shrugging gesture. "You're absolutely right. I work too much, take too much stuff home, and when you factor in Spider-Man . . . I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I know how important this was to you -- "

"I don't need another *apology*, Peter. I need a babysitter."

Peter sighed. "What do you want from me? I can't stay home with May as much as we both need me to, and I can't stop being Spider-Man! So what do you want me to do?" His own frustration was plain in his voice.

Mary Jane stared at her husband for a few seconds, then started sobbing. Peter moved around the bed to where she stood crying, and gathered her into a hug. "I'm right here."