

15 - A Typical Day

“Ooh!” Joyce happily wowed as she watched Emily diligently work at the page in the book. A handful of thick, dull-pointed crayons were lazily strewn about the glass table top, and she had planted herself in between the coffee table and couch. Joyce was right beside her, only sitting on the couch. On top of this the band still held true to their new trio. Emily wasn’t sitting on the floor, and in fact on her knees. Somewhat, at least. The new third member, Pip, forced the image of not only just a dessert to Emily, but also a convenient cushion...Between her legs, the denim skirt to her dress was just barely covering the unfaltering smile sewn on its pudgy body. Her bottom was getting nicely acquainted with Pip’s entire body, and if visuals were any indication, he didn’t seem to mind.

“That birdy looks very cute,” Joyce commented as Emily with extreme care worked her blue crayon along the thick black lines; the kind that was forgiving for the countless aspiring artists who maybe got a little too excited with their coloring...

Emily was just as engaged as Joyce was enthralled through sheer spectatorship. A little handheld creative expression was always fun, because things like this were meant to point you down a path and all that’s left is to step on the gas. Playing with stuffed toys was oddly intimidating because there were no safety rails. The art of acting like a kid could certainly not be underestimated, and learning how to play wasn’t an easy job...

The canvas like any other had been pure white; absent of influence and in a state of patience waiting to be disturbed. The brushes and tools of illustration caused ripples across the page, and despite being heavily regulated by the printers preceding Emily’s own unique touch, she breathed life into the commercialized blueprint. It was especially satisfying for Joyce watching it all come together. The most distinct pieces to the page were a chirping bird, her baby chicks sitting in their nest, perched high on the tree. The branch supporting the small family followed an expanding path into a much more girthy tree trunk, and beyond the foreground decorated in leaves was a distant field marked by a stream trailing off to the horizon.

The mama bird was the first and only thing Emily’d worked on, and Joyce always loved to see a big plan come together. When each and every individual aspect was treated with care and caution, once assembled it would yield an amazing product.

“You’re such a careful colorer, my little artist,” Joyce spoke in a syrupy voice, stroking Emily’s hair which only heightened the pleasant atmosphere the girl was immersed in.

“Well I don’t wanna mess it up...” Emily sheepishly explained, suddenly embarrassed by her own dedication. “It needs to look neat.”

“It needs to look like you had fun coloring,” Joyce corrected. “Nobody here expects anything of you but to have fun and be happy! If that’s what does it for you though, then I want you to take as long as you want. More importantly, why did you make the birdy blue?”

“Because it looks like a blue jay,” Emily shifted from outline work to a steady back and forth scribble, filling in the white space with an even stroke and pace. “Why?”

“No reason...” Joyce’s voice trailed as she continued to look on with just as much amusement. “What are you gonna color next? Tell Mommy how my little girl’s planned it out!” Her curiosity over the tiniest details had her on the edge of her seat.

In the middle of her small set of words, Emily had paused to take a sip--a suck, or two from her bottle. The drink was good, and even despite being in a bottle it hardly put a damper on the taste.

“I dunno, the leaves?” She briefly scanned the page, honestly unsure herself. There was no rhyme or reason to her approach or angle, and what her next plan of action would be spur of the moment. Whatever she felt like doing was what she’d do next.

The tv had been playing in the background which helped as a degree of white noise for the two, but the forefront of their attentions were either focused on the drawing or the artist. It was pretty clear who was watching what. Finally, the parental bird had been colored solid and the chicks would come later on. Emily felt like targeting something else right now, and the leaves were looking a little too lifeless for her tastes...As a mental memory, without looking over to it, Emily set her hand right where the green crayon should’ve been, and then her complacency was interrupted by stupidity when she’d only managed to press her hand against the glass.

Finally looking, Emily swept her vision across the table and crayon box, realizing the green had mysteriously disappeared. She looked around her knees, legs, and feet, but there wasn’t anything to be found. Nothing other than Pip, of course.

“Joyce, did you see where I put the green?” She turned back to Joyce, who looked just as neutral as she’d always been. Only...there was something that told Emily she was playing a part in this mischief...

“No? What do you mean?” Without moving from her spot, she looked to her own sides on the couch, finding nothing either.

“I could have sworn I left it on the table...” Passively, she explained whilst her mind wandered elsewhere, still searching for her tool.

“Did you check the floor?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t see anything...”

“Your pocket?” Singular. The only pocket Emily had to keep watch of was the one sewn on the front of her dress. Still, she was pretty sure she would have noticed if a fat crayon had snuck its way in there...Nevertheless, although not expecting it, she didn’t pay much mind when Joyce leaned forward to open it for her. Peering inside herself, all there was at the bottom was the denim crease. Empty.

“That’s strange...” Joyce spoke simply, adjusting the front of Emily’s skirt.

Inflating her cheeks with mild annoyance, Emily gave a brief mumble. “Now I can’t finish the leaves...” Until the green runaway could be found, the remaining white space fell back into the forefront of her mind; deciding what she could color next until the green showed itself again.

“Why can’t you finish the leaves?” Joyce asked, breaking Emily’s concentration.

Mindlessly while she spoke, Emily wrapped her hands on Joyce’s knee and nuzzled her cheek into it. “Because I don’t have the green?” For some reason, this was starting to feel oddly repetitive.

Joyce grabbed the box of crayons and finished emptying its contents onto the table, saying, “Leaves aren’t just green, silly.” She organized them in an orderly line for Emily to see. “Leaves are whatever color you want them to be!”

Well, she wasn’t wrong...The brown, yellow, red, and orange crayons were all likely candidates as well. Who said it had to be summer or spring? Fall was perfectly viable too. Nonchalantly, Emily went for the red crayon, but was quickly shut out by a much more adult hand guarding the path.

“Joyce...” Emily whined in a pretending groan. “Why can’t I use the red?”

“Were you thinking about the Fall?”

“Y...yes?” What was she doing wrong? And how was her mindset that predictable? It was just a drawing! What’s the point in creativity if you can’t create as you please? The whole situation was starting to feel like some grand oxymoron the further Emily drowned in her one-sided conclusions. “You *said* they weren’t just green!”

“I know I did, and that’s true,” Joyce agreed, only mucking up Emily’s sense of clarity further. “But I think you’re missing the point, honey.” Watching Emily’s frustrations mildly boil almost had Joyce giggling the slightest, just because she knew how minor of a detail she was getting so hung up on. In that way Emily truly resembled a happy-go-lucky child. They’d never once known what it was like to encounter an adult responsibility, which is why even the smallest challenges or upsets to them was like trying to move a mountain. Her intentions were of course all good, but it was clear Emily wasn’t getting the fuller picture...

Before she responded, Emily paused to take another sip from her bottle, causing Joyce’s heart to flutter at the sight. And as more time went on, a feeling in Emily’s bladder she’d been trying to ignore had come knocking more frequently with each passing moment. It was a double-edged sword, really. At the cost of delicious drinks and wonderful caffeine, it was her toilet habits that had to pay the toll. The feeling though was just starting to reach the point of downright uncomfortable. She was becoming distracted though. She’d deal with the bathroom later, or quite possibly her diaper might...

“Why can’t I pick the colors I want?” She looked at Joyce questioningly. “I thought it was my drawing?”

“You can use any colors you want,” Joyce lifted her hand off the red crayon, and moved over to Emily’s head with a pat. “I just want you to express yourself freely. Don’t think about how things *should* be.”

Truthfully, Emily was still lost, and she didn’t feel like she was any closer to the truth. “I still don’t get it...” Annoyed at her own incompetence, she mumbled right before taking another sip.

“Yes you do, pouty pants,” Joyce lightly chided as she slipped into the space right next to Emily and onto her own knees. Even with Pip's support, Emily didn’t come close to being as tall as Joyce. “You just don’t realize it yet.”

“I’m not mad...” Emily sheepishly whined at the sound of the name “pouty pants.” Her cheeks burned and despite being the one who insulted her, she leaned closer into Joyce.

Chuckling, Joyce continued. “Then prove it to me. I want you to stop thinking logically. Color whatever you want with whatever color you want! Make the rivers green! Make the grass orange! Who said trees had to be brown? And there’s no need for the leaves to be green. I want to know what Emmy thinks they should be. Whatever color that feels right to *you* is what you should be using.”

Whatever feels right. Still puzzled, Emily looked down on the drawing, as well as to the crayons. On paper, what Joyce was saying finally made sense, but from how Emily understood it, she was supposed to detach herself from rational thought altogether and let her feelings dictate the canvas? What was she, some sort of mindless kid?

Oh, right.

Apprehensively she looked at the array of colors, as if she were about to cut the wrong wire. The more she sat there with her thoughts, the more frustrating it became. She couldn’t even play with stuffed toys, and now she couldn’t color? How pathetic could she be?

“I still can’t do it, Joyce...” With a slightly upturned lower lip, Emily slumped over in a defeated stature. More than anything she hated to fail Joyce’s expectations and second to that was her own inability to be creative.

“Yes you can, and you already have. You’re overthinking it!”

As much as she loved Joyce, it still didn’t change that it was annoying to be told she could do something when she was adamant she can’t. What was perplexing about her encouragement though was Joyce saying she’d already done it. How? This was the first time she’d ever picked up a crayon around her!

“All you need to do is simply...” Joyce leaned in close to Emily’s ear, and her following words tickled the surface of her skin with her warm, lovely breath. “Let go...”

She kept stroking Emily’s back as she continued to encourage her little girl and help her find her place yet again. “Just let yourself fall into things. You’ve been doing it all this morning. When you were in your nursery, when I fed you in your high chair, put you in your nice and soft clothes that Amy made for you? Didn’t all of that make you feel so fuzzy? Or did I not give you enough kisses? Is that it?” On cue, she started to assault Emily with countless pecks on the cheek, earning a torrent of giggles as Emily, without moving from her spot, tried to avoid them. With each peck and whisper though, her soft voice almost resembled the beginnings of a light hypnosis.

Finally the kissing stopped, and Joyce moved on. “When kids play they don’t think too hard about it, silly.” She playfully tapped her finger on Emily’s bare forehead. “And neither should you. It’s about living in the moment and having fun with it. There’s no one here to tell you how things need to be or should be. I’ll always love you whether you’re my big girl or baby, but whenever you’re my little girl, I think you’ll have a lot more fun when you start acting like it. And don’t tell me you can’t, because I’ve seen you firsthand already have giggle fits, and you’ve already done things like making a new friend, drinking from a bottle, using a pacifier?” The countless things she listed off was suddenly trying to call her back to her adult mindset, where embarrassment and shame were waiting on the other side.

“And I *don’t* mean that as a bad thing,” Joyce spoke almost sternly, as if to scare away the big and bad adult thoughts in her head. Only the happy, baby Emmy was allowed to come out and play. Mama Bear wouldn’t let anyone or anything affect that, even if it were Emily herself. “These are all wonderful signs that show you know how to relax; how to be my little girl...”

The reminder of a sense of ownership is what resonated within Emily the most. She belonged to Joyce, and she wanted to show it too. As she looked down at herself, clad in a diaper, dress, and onesie, it was suddenly becoming harder and harder to consider adult things at the moment. She started to remember the short banter she had with Joyce in the nursery; naked except for a bra and diaper whilst she was caught in a tickle attack. There wasn’t any shame in that moment, and here she was in more clothing than in that moment. Yes. She was starting to feel it.

The further she sunk, the more tangible it started to feel. That sense of playfulness she’d been continuously tapping into. It was coming somewhere from within, and she could feel it drawing closer to the surface. All she needed to do was push; push and it would make itself known! She could feel the pressure as such familiar feelings were ready to burst. Yes! She’d finally found it! Then on command, she couldn’t hold back anymore and let the feeling envelop her. It was warm, seemingly wonderful, and...and...and wet?

Despite having her eyes closed, that feeling of happiness she thought she’d taken hold of was suddenly feeling extremely limited from the waist down, and not as happy as she thought. It was almost like a liquid pouring out of her...No, it definitely was. It was like a stream; hot, wet, and something she couldn’t stop. Regardless, she let out an involuntary sigh as whatever she’d just expelled from within had taken some effort. But then she started to feel it; creeping all over her skin and in her diaper...Quietly, she could only look at anything but Joyce while she emptied her bladder. Frankly, what she thought was the answer was just her bladder calling...and she answered it. As it pooled in her diaper, she slightly panicked.

Without much regard for who was watching, Emily lifted her denim skirt, fearing the worst as stopping the pee was a hopeless cause. Thankfully as her seemingly unending stream did stop, she didn't seem to have leaked...Leaning forward just a little bit, her friend Pip seemed to be alright too, though she could feel the pee that had yet to be fully absorbed slosh ever so slightly in her underwear. Her diaper though felt noticeably squishier and slightly heavier...

"J...Joyce, I..." Emily started with a quiet whimper, almost on the verge of tears, but a pacifier was suddenly between her lips. If anything, maybe the taste of bananas could calm her nerves.

"Shh, it's alright." Soothingly, Joyce guided Emily's hands from her skirt, letting it fall back to her knees. With enough physical encouragement, Joyce eased the reluctant girl back onto Pip, the glorified bum-cushion, causing Emily to wince once she could feel the more prominent squish. "Don't worry, you're fine, see?" With much more sympathetic maternalism, Joyce was much slower with her next kiss, taking her time to convey as much serenity and security as possible. Emily while willingly accepting the skinship could only try and be comfortable with reddening cheeks and her posture.

"No leaks, you're all good. All dry, see? Don't worry about what goes on down there, okay?" It was unspokenly clear that her notion referred to what was beneath the pale, yellow onesie. "Let's go back to coloring. That's a lot more fun and interesting, right?" Meekly, Emily could only nod her head. Thankfully Joyce somehow made it all bearable. More than anything she was afraid of the mess she'd cause...It felt even worse knowing that this was one wetting on top of another. Twice she'd wet this diaper.

It wasn't how Joyce wanted to ease her into things, but regardless of whether it was an inch or a mile, there were an awful lot of inches in a mile...

"You know you're not supposed to be embarrassed about your diapers around me?" Raising a brow, she looked at Emily with a smirk, silent from the pacifier, but her cheeks burning even harder. She knew she wasn't supposed to be, but breaking a habit to not be embarrassed was impossibly difficult. Just because birds had wings, that didn't mean they knew how to fly from the get-go. It wasn't so much that Joyce saw her do it, but rather she did the deed to begin with.

"Okay, come on," Joyce sounding much more upbeat guided Emily's hand over to the crayons. "Pick a color that makes you happy! Or maybe silly?"

Desperate for a distraction, Emily quickly looked the crayons over, and in a mildly frenzied state she had only but instinct to rely on which was screaming purple. Something about it called to her, and she couldn't place a good reason as to why. It just felt...*right*.

“Now all you need to do,” Joyce grabbed Emily’s hand holding the crayon, and aimed it at the page in the coloring book. She pressed down for her, and not a moment later the purple had touched ground, “is move that hand and have fun with it!”

Under normal circumstances, purple had no place in this drawing. There was no reason for it. The leaves were green, the tree was brown. The birdies were blue, the sun was yellow, the river was turquoise...

But...but why *couldn't* the leaves be purple? Or the tree be red? The more she stared at the page, it felt as if Emily’s senses were heightened, and for real this time she was falling back into a familiar place. Between her lifelong absolutes and givens, much more illogical wedges slipped right in. The grass suddenly looked blue, and the idea of yellow birds seemed much more appealing now...With a new sense of creativity flooding in her mind like pee into her diaper, she dressed her canvas in a new blanket of inspiration.

A small clacking noise was the last thing to be heard when the piece was finally finished. Beside the page were countless crayons of varying wear; clearly used for scribbles and more detailed scrawls. Unorthodox in every sense, the image looked as if a rainbow had thrown up on it. The leaves were indeed purple, and the bark was a crimson red. The baby birds must have been stolen from their true home, because the yellow chicks clearly didn’t match their bluer parent.

As Emily looked at it, even though the color scheme had no rhyme or reason, an odd sense of pride filled her...As if she’d accomplished something greater than the drawing itself. Picked up the book, she pivoted on her waist and held it in front of Joyce, who was mimicking the toothy smile Emily now had, only her’s was partly hidden by the pacifier.

In a muffled cheer, Emily yelled, “Done!”

Suddenly with a spectator; a critic for her work, Emily started to become much more mindful of her efforts now. Letting Joyce take the book from her, she shuffled her knees slightly in anticipation for what the review would be. But as she watched Joyce observe the page, her smile never seemed to falter, and if anything grew wider.

“It’s beautiful, my little Picasso!”

Hearing her fawn over the drawing somehow made Emily feel irrationally well; proud of what she'd done. She had poured her heart and soul into something so trivial, yet Joyce acknowledged all of it and only sung with praise. That fuzzy feeling of warmth and being saturated in affection was what she was feeling, and she loved every second of it.

Finally removing the pacifier from her mouth, Emily twiddling her thumbs addressed the most glaring issue with the drawing.

"I...I was gonna make all the birds the same color, but I changed my mind and picked yellow...Now they don't look the same..." In her mind Joyce's happiness made the drawing perfect, but her personal blunder took it down just a level from that.

"I think I like it more this way," Joyce spoke in a calm voice, as if her speech was secondary to pensive thought. Her eyes kept spanning the masterpiece whilst she made note of every little detail.

"What do you mean?" What did she mean? Wouldn't it be better if all the birds were the same color? Or at least stick to a theme and make them *all* multicolored...

"Just because the Mama bird is blue, why should her babies have to be?"

"Well...because..." Such a simple question seemed to have stumped Emily. Wasn't it supposed to be a given that they'd be blue? Blue birds gave birth to blue birds after all... "Because they're her babies? Wouldn't they look the same?"

"I don't think so," Joyce with her motherly tone continued while Emily watched from below like an attentive student during story time. "What matters is that the baby birds are loved, and love their Mama. It doesn't matter if they look the same or not."

It was true, but for some reason Emily still wasn't fully convinced...She felt like there was an analogy here she wasn't getting...Joyce could read her expression on her face, and finally unveiled the shroud to really drive the point home, or at least give a concrete example.

"Well, aren't you my baby girl?"

Hearing those words put an involuntary smile on Emily's face while she bashfully tried to look away. The glaring antithesis to her own thought process had been in front of her the whole time. How could she have been so stupid? She and Joyce both came from different walks of life, but here they were...Mother and her daughter...

Joyce set the coloring book back on the table, and grabbed a corner of the page with a firm grip. “I know *exactly* where I want this to go...” Excitement was evident in Joyce’s voice, and suddenly Emily grew a little bit nervous. Staring at the page now, the hidden connection was suddenly made as Emily could now see the perforated edge to the page. They were meant to be torn out...

“Joyce? What are you doing?” Emily tried to confirm her suspicions; her worst fears.

“Well we can’t leave something as pretty as this locked up!” Joyce happily explained, and with a quick tear the page in all its splendor had been removed from the book. “Now come on, sweetie, every good drawing needs its artist’s signature!” She leaned in for a playful whisper, “That’s how they’re worth lots of money!” Emily couldn’t help but snicker hearing Joyce elevate her work to the level of the greats, and seemingly make her feel like she was at the top of the world. Grabbing a black crayon, Emily conceded and signed a uniform, textbook ‘E’ at the bottom right corner.

“Now it’s perfect.” Joyce approvingly nodded her head, helping Emily up on her feet and walking to the kitchen. Awkwardly Emily waddled slightly now that the bulk between her legs had gotten a bit bigger...

Joyce rummaged through a drawer and found what she needed, taking the drawing and pressing it against the fridge, pinning it in place with a magnet. There as it hung on the door, there was very mixed reactions coming from the two as they stared.

“But won’t people see it?” Worriedly, Emily asked. She was okay with Joyce seeing it, but now that it was on public display for anyone in the house and she’d signed her first initial on it, who knows what could happen? She was starting to feel less confident about her coloring job.

“That’s the whole point,” Joyce said while smoothening Emily’s hair. “And when you’re like this, you can take credit for it all you want. And when you’re a big girl? Well...We can just say my friend’s niece made some art for me.”

Still uncertain, Emily watched the drawing nervously. “Can’t...can’t we just take it down instead? Put it somewhere more private?”

“Nope!” Joyce happily declined as she steered Emily back into the living room.

Not expecting a complete and total denial, Emily spoke with a bit of surprise. “Wh-What do you mean, no? But...but...” She tried to think of a way to retaliate, but Joyce was the one in charge...

“You said you wanted me to take a little more control, and I am,” Soothingly Joyce rubbed Emily’s back. “No one’s going to find out that it’s yours, unless you want to of course.” They both knew the answer to that. “But like you said, I should be taking charge a little bit more. You’re gonna need to trust me on stuff like this.”

She wanted to trust Joyce, really, she did, but it wasn’t so easy to put all your stock in some other person. With Joyce she already could do a great deal, but it was still something to get used to.

Back in the living room, Emily picked up her near-empty bottle, asking, “Could I have some more coffee, please?”

Joyce took the bottle from her, but didn’t receive her with complete compliance. “Why don’t we try just juice or straight milk?”

“I thought you said it was my birthday?” Emily with a fake, laughable and expectant tone interjected. At the same time, didn’t Joyce say she’d be getting some leeway today?

“It is, and if that’s what you want I’ll give it to you, but I just don’t want you to be too energetic right before you go down for your nap...” Joyce looked at the bottle for a moment.

Nap? She still had to take one today? Suddenly her mind was flashing back to the nursery, when Joyce threatened to make her nap longer... “But do I have to?” For once it was a wholehearted, genuine complaint.

“Yes,” Joyce smiled sympathetically, “You do.”

“But your parents are coming tomorrow!” Emily tried to defend her position; find some way to overcome the impossible barrier known as nap time. “Shouldn’t we be spending as much time together as possible?” She was a big fan of sleep, but she was an even bigger fan of playing with Joyce.

“Little girls need a little break to be nice and energetic for the second half of the day,” Joyce explained, as she walked back into the kitchen for the second time, with a complaining and protesting Emily as the caboose. She unscrewed the top of the bottle. “Birthday or not.”

Suddenly coupled by hanging her drawing, and being absolute about her nap, Joyce was starting to feel an awful lot like a...like a mother.

“But when they come, we can’t do this again until they leave!” Emily whined yet again, focusing her frustrations on the inability to maintain their play time. She harbored no ill will against Joyce’s parents, but she could feel herself wanting to cling desperately to what they had. Joyce merely tutted her voice, opening the fridge. “Emmy’s already starting to sound a bit cranky...” She smirked looking back to the girl. “Maybe we should put you down a little bit early?” Visibly annoyed and distraught, Emily could only watch silently as Joyce continued her rhythm. “I know you’re having fun, and I am too,” Joyce was back to her calm, non-teasing self. “But having a routine is a part of the package. You may not like it, but that’s how things are. I’m supposed to be your Mommy right now, remember?”

Indeed, she was, and Emily could feel it so greatly. It felt impossible to defy what Joyce said, as it was law. She could try and struggle, but they both knew who would win in the end. It was admittedly part of why Emily was enjoying this so much...

“I know my parents are coming tomorrow and you’re feeling a little rushed, but there’s still a whole lot of time left for us to be together. And hey, how about this? Maybe an earlier nap time isn’t such a bad idea after all...Why don’t I put you down for your nap early so we can get started even sooner for the afternoon?”

Unsure of how to answer, Emily could only stare at Joyce helplessly. She wouldn’t be getting her way, that was certain, but she had the power to at least mitigate her frustrations. She was being a brat, and Joyce only continued to love her. Maybe taking a nap sooner was better...She’d be much too focused on its impending doom later on otherwise.

“Okay...” Meekly, Emily sighed as she accepted Joyce’s loving stares.

“It’s settled then. But for that reason, I think I’m going to make an executive decision and swap you over to juice...” Joyce had already put the milk away.

After the bottle was filled, Emily was escorted back to the nursery where two important pieces of furniture laid.

“First things first,” Joyce catching Emily by surprise hoisted her up and onto the changing table, pulling the strap over her. Powerless to stop her, as well as never intending to, Emily resigned herself to Joyce as she unsnapped the crotch of her onesie and flipped the denim skirt up for better access. Joyce silently noted the obvious discoloration, and pronounced bulk from the

effective absorption. The diaper still looked like it could take a bit more, but Joyce figured it was not only enough for Emily's efforts, but nap time should always earn a change if one was warranted.

The whole time while she set out to work, Joyce fell into her pacifying hum, which was almost enough to distract Emily from the new diaper being slipped underneath her bottom, and the powder over her crotch. Once she was all taped up, Joyce redid the onesie and set her back on the ground. Emily was happy to be dry again.

"Arms up like a ballerina, Emmy," Joyce encouraged, while Emily lifted her arms straight into the air. Grabbing it by the denim straps, Joyce lifted the dress portion off of Emily and she was left in just a yellow, form-fitting onesie. Suddenly Emily felt a tad bit lighter, and was passively aware of how the swaying sensation of a skirt had left her.

Unlatching it, the crib's side had been lowered, and with Joyce's help placed Emily inside of it. She noticed the obvious difference in size compared to her normal bed; half the width and slightly shorter in length. She wasn't in a tight space by any means; slightly bigger than maybe a college dorm bed. As she sat there, criss-cross, she nudged the small pile of stuffed animals guarding her pillow. The onesie was soft, her feet were covered in socks, the diaper's interior was admittedly soft, and the mattress was cushy and foamy. The bars surrounding her provided an odd sense of security, and she didn't seem to mind them as much as she thought she would. Everything surrounding her and what she was clothed in came from someone else. It was all put into place by another person despite it all being meant for Emily. She hadn't a hand in even the food that went in her belly. Everything was done for her, and for a brief moment she could forget what it was like to be independent.

When Joyce raised the lowered crib side, Emily realized that there might be a small struggle in getting over it by herself...Not impossible, but not easy...

Setting the bottle in the crib beside her, Joyce helped Emily get underneath the covers and situated.

"Now you get all nice and rested up for me, got it?" Joyce spoke in a hushed voice, already trying to talk Emily into a sleepy setting. She closed the curtains to the windows for the most part, but the outer edges of daytime still bled through the cracks between the shades and outside world. She was doing her best not to be too energetic, lest that rub off on the girl who should be feeling fatigued and tired. Emily, however, had her heart beating a mile a minute despite being so comfy all over. Not only was she back in the nursery, but in her crib for the first time to boot. From head to toe she was dressed like an infant, and she'd been given a nap time bottle in case

she got thirsty...Sometimes Joyce played her part too well, because Emily could find little distinction between herself and a normal baby. She'd have no trouble falling asleep with how comfy she felt, but she was simply too excited to calm herself.

“Joyce?”

“What is it, hon?”

“I don't feel tired...”

“That's because you're not trying to sleep, silly.”

“No, that's not what I mean. I'm just...excited, that's all...”

“Well, I think I'd beg to differ.” Joyce happily hung her head over the top of the crib, and her face shined down on Emily like the sun. Or the moon, given the room had been made darker.

Seeing Joyce look so unconvinced strangely had Emily giggling for no reason whatsoever. “I'm serious, though!” Emily raised her voice a little, trying to master her own emotions as well as convince Joyce otherwise.

“I think it's because you haven't tried going to sleep yet.” With one hand, she laid it on Emily's shoulder and gently pushed her back onto the mattress. Emily's head collided with the feathery and fluffy pillow. She didn't even know if the thing was stuffed with feathers, but it felt like a cloud nonetheless. “I'll stay by your side until you're off to sleepy land,” Joyce reassured, holding Emily's hand through the bars.

“Joyce?”

“What is it, sweetie?”

“How come you picked me?”

“Picked you?”

Needing to elaborate further had Emily feeling a little nervous and awkward.

“Y...yeah. Ever since that night on the street, I've always wondered why you stopped for me...”

Dancing her thumb in Emily's palm, Joyce pondered the question for a moment.

"It's...hard to explain, but there was something about you. There still is." For a brief moment, she looked into Emily's eyes which were laying on the pillow. "When I saw you I thought to myself, 'This person seems special to me. I don't know why, but I want to chase that feeling.' And of course you looked down on your luck, but..." She chuckled, realizing she had no real answer. "Maybe that's what they call love at first sight?" She didn't know what kind of love she had for Emily, but it was one that involved physical affection, and she was more than satisfied by discovering it as time went on.

Emily's heart thumped heavily at the words, hearing Joyce relaxedly confess her emotions. But at the same time, the crib's mattress, pillow, and blankets were feeling soft...In a way it was soothing enough just to hear Joyce speak, just like when she hummed. Everything about her seemed so calming, through and through.

"Did you plan to talk me into this when we first met?" The feelings behind her question were of a blank slate. She had no motive and was simply curious. It was clear by this point she'd acclimated to being Joyce's baby girl, but it made Emily wonder if this was the plan all along.

"No..." Joyce answered simply, staring off into space. "Everything about you I found and still find adorable," She brushed Emily's cheek, who blinked her eyes heavily. "I think I started to fantasize though pretty early on, about us; enjoying some sort of relationship like this. I never thought it'd happen in a million years, though..." Her last sentence came off as thick, and almost shaky. "What I was so attracted to in the beginning was being able to let you feel so carefree; like everything being taken care of, not having to lift a finger. I don't think I'll ever know why I feel that way, but I still enjoy it despite not knowing why." Memories of their earlier days resurfaced, and she could still picture the night she'd gotten Emily her first wave of clothes; the fashionista trying on every bit. Truthfully, she wanted to see her in some of the more revealing items, that being just underwear, but what it would symbolize to Joyce was a sign of acceptance, and a willingness to be unreserved around Joyce. Again, it was what the act represented, not so much the deed itself.

"And...what else...?" Her words were becoming more drawn out. Clearly she wasn't as energetic as she'd thought. Everything around her was working against her, but at the same time towards her objective benefit. Her eyes slightly wandered about the room, catching Mr.Bear's neutral, yet happy face, the thick carpet, the unoccupied changing table, the hanging paintings on the wall...Joyce. "How can I be a better baby...?"

Joyce let out a small laugh, stifled mostly to keep Emily from getting any of her energy back. There were a few things that came to mind which would make these experiences all the more genuine and amazing, but Joyce would never totally force something on Emily. Besides, things as they were, were already perfect. Anything on top of this would have been a bonus. And if Emily didn't discover it herself, there would be no mutual enjoyment. What she did eye though was the diaper bulge behind Emily's onesie. There was still one last way she could use it and she had yet to try that it. Joyce wasn't looking forward to it, either, namely because it would be certain to cause Emily a meltdown. She hated to see her girl be so distraught.

"In the short term?" Joyce brought a finger to her chin like she needed to give it some thought. "Going to sleep, missy! This isn't 20 questions. It's called nap time for a reason!" Her joke earned a sleepy smile from Emily. "But as for everything else, I couldn't ask for more than you just having fun with it. A happy baby makes a happy mommy. You're perfect just the way you are, Emmy." Finally, Emily's eyes had closed, and Joyce could just hear the slight, rhythmic breathing through her nose. She was a slumbering angel, and Joyce did everything in her power so as not to disturb it.

Nudging the bottle by Emily's side for just in case, Joyce quietly watched Emily for a few moments longer, and the longer she stared, the blurrier her vision felt. Between the moments of fog in her eyes, they briefly cleared for short moments as it seemed to fall from her eyes, and soon be replaced by a new glossy tint. Covering her mouth with a hand, she could only watch Emily in an attempted silence.

Thank you, Emily! Thank you for everything you've done. For being with me, for accepting who I am, reciprocating the feelings I have for you... With one last smile, she sniffled as she closed the door to yet again a near, but not complete, close. Almost frustrated, she practically hated nap time as much as the one who needed to sleep through it. Blinking the final tears out of her eyes, Joyce rolled up her thick, sweater sleeves as she bent over the coffee table to tidy up the pile of crayons. Her little girl had certainly made a small mess of her toys, and Joyce was more than happy to clean them up. Apart from setting a few logic puzzles aside, she grabbed a bundle of the stuffed animals next and transitioned her audible steps across the hardwood floor into quiet muffs over the nursery carpet. While Emily innocently slumbered Joyce arranged them nicely in her toy chest.

And when she bent over, Joyce suddenly felt something in her pocket. Pulling it out, it was a small stick of green she happened to forget about. She'd need to remember to put this back...

“Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake,” Joyce’s voice rose and fell to the rhythm, “Baker man! Bake me a cake as fast as you...?” Like a doting mother, Joyce left her charge the easiest part, yet still letting her feel like she could contribute.

“Can!” Emily finished chipperly, responsible for a single, measly lyric, yet regarding it with the weight of the world. Between each small pause, the small slapping noise of skin to skin from their claps filled the kitchen. Emily’s legs swung back and forth, suspended in the air whilst her little song with Joyce devolved into a mutual giggle fit.

“Mmm mmm!” Joyce jovially hummed as she kissed Emily all over, contently restrained to her high chair. “Too delicious for words! Maybe I should eat you up for lunch instead, huh?” Joyce continued to tease as she grabbed Emily’s dangling foot, sending the girl into further, mild hysterics.

With a new bib already tied around her neck, all that was left was for Joyce to move the plate of sliced up fruit over to Emily. The bottle of juice from her nap still remained, halfway full, but Joyce gave it a quick refresher by leaving it in the fridge for a little bit. And each and every time she swung the door open, Joyce always had Emily’s adorable drawing to fawn over.

“Somebody think they’re ready for some yummy fruit?” Taunting, Joyce set the plate on Emily’s tray. Decorated as a small platter, it was filled with grapes, apple and orange slices, as well as a few pieces of cantaloupe.

Happily and hungrily, Emily nodded her head as the food was finally within reach. Without a moment’s hesitation, she nabbed one of the apple slices, freed of its outer skin, and munched on the fulfilling slice. As good as it was, there was of course the slight tinge of sourness to it; the sourness that made you crave for more.

With her eyes focused on her phone, Joyce massaged Emily’s scalp as she ate, and even Joyce paused to grab a piece of orange from the plate. Her eyes then wandered to the cabinets, suddenly longing for something with a little bit more variety to it...She liked sweet, but too much of it was simply overbearing. Emily was the exception, of course.

“And while you eat your yummy fruit, Mommy’s gonna make a sandwich,” Joyce explained in simple terms, like she was speaking to a genuine toddler.

Suddenly at the thought of a sandwich, Emily found herself finding the idea of meat, vegetables, cheeses and other condiments much more appealing than a singular platter of fruit...Guiltily, she paused in between her bites to ask, “Could...could I have one too?”

Joyce turned back to the plate of fruit, seeing a few more pieces had disappeared since she last saw it. There wasn't any trouble making one for Emily too, but she had a sneaking suspicion that she wouldn't be able to get the whole thing down, *with* the fruit included...Again, money was no issue, and so be it if food didn't get finished, but the idea of consciously wasting any wasn't ideal...

"Tell you what," Joyce opened her proposition and continued to untie the package of bread. "You split the fruit platter with me, and I'll split my sandwich with you? Sound good?"

"But doesn't that mean you won't get to eat your whole sandwich?" Remorsefully, Emily asked, wishing not to impact Joyce's own meal.

"No, that means Mommy's being forced to stop being such a picky eater," She continued to unload various things from the fridge. "Besides, I think a good mix of everything would be better for you."

Emily knew it probably wasn't the entire truth, and Joyce was just making it seem convenient. Despite what the truth really was though, Emily did her best to cling onto Joyce's fabrications, knowing well by now that Joyce wouldn't like to see her be so moody...While she waited, a piece of cantaloupe from the plate had mysteriously vanished.

"Joyce?"

"Uh-huh?"

"What're you parents like?" Even Emily knew it was a bit ridiculous to be asking this late in the game, but it was better late than never...

Based on Joyce's reaction, she didn't seem to think it was as stupid as Emily thought, or at least didn't let on for it to be.

"My mom and dad are nice," Joyce spoke plainly, not sure how to add much flavor to people she considered somewhat mundane. In reality that wasn't the case, but Joyce knew them more as parents than anything else. "I think I already told you that my dad likes to cook? From the sound of it he's still at it. He taught me just about everything I know."

"What about your mom?"

“About her...” Joyce repeated, trying to dig for something noteworthy. Correction, something *positive*, and noteworthy. Their last few chats over the phone weren’t what Joyce would consider splendid... “She’s very sociable. She likes meeting new people, and I think she might be all over you,” Joyce snickered, imagining their arrival tomorrow. That being said, she’d need to throttle her mom for Emily’s sake as well...

“And...how much do they know about...”

“Us?”

Emily quietly nodded her head.

“Well...you may have been able to guess, but since that night when you were sick, my mom has known about you.” She continued to chop away at the tomatoes. “And...” she finally looked over to Emily who seemed to be listening intently. “She knows we’re in a relationship...”

Underneath her onesie, Emily could feel her heart beat heavy at the sound of the reveal, suddenly feeling herself be swept into a tizzy that made it hard to keep her head straight. At the same time, she was much more attentive of the crinkle in her diaper when she squirmed. It was as if she could feel Joyce’s mother watching now.

“She...she does?” Almost afraid, Emily tried to confirm. And what was coupled with their bond was the biggest question of all: how to identify it.

“She does,” Joyce swept the chopped vegetables over to the side, unpackaging the meat next. “But! That’s why she’s so excited to meet you. I don’t know how much my dad knows, but I’m sure he’ll be looking forward to meeting you too.”

“But Joyce...what...what are we?” It wasn’t meant to hurt Joyce or come off as negative, but it was an important question that had been swept to the side for too long. As great as what they had was, it’s not like it could be deemed conventional...

“It...it can be whatever you want it to, but I want it to be clear that I do have feelings for you.” Joyce as openly as she could declared herself. Just like Emily, she wasn’t sure how sexual it was, and wasn’t opposed to moving forward, but her initial feelings were already right about where she expected them to be.

“That’s no fair,” Emily pouted, blushing at the sound of her sheer honesty. “Why do I have to be the only one to decide?”

“Fair enough,” Joyce conceded, speaking in a tone that no longer regarded Emily as her little girl. She’d be lying though if she said seeing her in the high chair, diaper, and onesie didn’t hurt the serious image... “I like you, Emily. Do you like me?”

“W...well...yeah...” Emily fidgeted in her seat nervously, unusually overwhelmed by such raw emotion. The waters still had yet to be totally charted, and she was confident she liked guys, but...maybe Joyce was an exception? She already had such strong feelings for Joyce, but she didn’t know how to identify them. They were on similar wavelengths, only that Joyce knew much better how to express them.

“Then how about we call ourselves girlfriends?” Once again, calmly, Joyce suggested the heavy-handed conclusion. Was it as easy as that, though? Emily couldn’t help but feel they would’ve had a tougher pill to swallow. Being Joyce’s girlfriend though...from here, what they had would be absolutely official. Other people, namely Joyce’s mom already knew there was something between the two, so all that was left was to give it a name. Maybe in a way their pace was rapid, but the kind of emotional bonding they’ve engaged in thus far has more than substituted for long term relationship building. It already was long term, just on a shorter scale.

“R...really? I’d be your...girlfriend?”

“Why not? I think it has a nice ring to it.”

Emily wasn’t completely sure why, but the title had her feeling giddy all over, like when she could slip into the shower after a long day at work, or sleeping in on a winter’s day. Joyce always knew how to give harmless words such meaning and impact.

“I’ve just...never had one before. That’s all.”

It wasn’t a total surprise to Joyce, given their special circumstances. Jack was her former lover though, so maybe Emily’s tendencies were somewhere in between? Maybe she just had yet to realize it?

“Well, now you can say that you have,” Pausing her prep work, Joyce came over to Emily, leaning in for a much more tender kiss than all the others. Emily received it like any other, but was a little shocked when instead of the cheek, chin, nose, or forehead; any of the usual spots, her lips locked with Emily’s, and an unusual sensation sparked through Emily, unlike any other kiss Joyce gave her. Not that any of the past ones were bad...but with this one, there was some, strange passion to it. Nothing like Emily had ever experienced before. A woman, no less. Emily

blinked her eyes, her only form of response as Joyce finally pulled away, the smile of a genuine lover never leaving her.

“But, that’s only when you’re a big girl,” Like a quick 180, Joyce’s entire demeanor and attitude had turned on a dime, and the new, romantic Joyce Emily had just witnessed was as gone as fast as the mommy in her came. “Behind closed doors let’s not forget you’re my little girl!” Joyce grinned mischievously, eating up every morsel of Emily’s frazzled reaction. Without another word, Joyce turned back to the counter, and Emily still in a muted state, bit her lower lip with more confusion than she’d ever felt before. In mere moments something had changed, and now her emotions were starting to feel conflicted in the most wonderful ways.

“And about my dad,” Joyce broke the silence, including Emily’s deep thought. “He’s got a big, booming voice.”

Still on the page of serious discussions, Emily couldn’t help but spurt into a laugh as she heard Joyce’s description.

“Booming? What do you mean, booming?” It wasn’t much to go on, and that made it all the funnier.

“You know, deep, resounding, and...loud?” With each adjective, Joyce tried to visualize a sense of magnitude with expanding hands, causing Emily to laugh even further. “He might come off as intimidating at first. He always used to around my friends when I was younger. But he’s a really nice guy when you start talking to him. He always had a soft spot for me when me and my brother were kids.” Joyce almost looked pretendedly smug, recalling all the brownie points she held over her younger brother. “I’m sure that’ll rub off onto you too!”

“Do you think they’ll like me?” Her nerves were getting the best of her, and the thought of being rejected by Joyce’s parents admittedly scared her.

“Don’t worry yourself over silly questions,” Joyce consoled, already confident with her answer. “It’d be harder for them *not* to like you.”

“I’m just nervous...that’s all.”

“Emily, even if there was the one in a million, billion, trillion, quadrillion chance that they didn’t? So what? That doesn’t change what we have. What we do is our business, and they have no right to intervene. We’re adults, right? Well,” She happily looked over at Emily, who was in the middle of much more suggestive circumstances. “At least one of us is.”

“Hey...!” Emily whined, suddenly wanting herself out of the high chair much more now. To prove a point Joyce was pretending to deny. But deep down, Emily knew she had nothing to prove.

“I know, I know...I’m sorry...” Joyce’s apologies sounded genuine, which made forgiveness the only possible route for Emily.

“Do you like yours with or without the crust?”

It was a question Emily wasn’t expecting...but seeing as the way she was being treated, it wasn’t totally unexpected...

“...yes please.”