

59 - Training Time

“How’s it coming?” Joyce leaned over Emily’s shoulder with a warm mug in hand.

“Don’t look...!” her girlfriend whined. She suddenly hunched over the page and her workstation– the coffee table in front of the TV.

Laughing, Joyce sat down on the far end of the couch, far enough to keep prying eyes away. “It’s no problem if I see it, right? I’m the one who needs to mail it to the North Pole, you know.”

“Mmph...” Emily again communicated in tones and sounds rather than actual words. Her shins laid on the floor as she contemplated ideas. Her phone was also sitting on the table as a last resort for inspiration.

“What if we made it a pretty list?” Joyce suggested. “How about we get some crayons from your nursery?”

“No,” Emily quickly refused, scribbling another idea down with her pencil. Why did she have to do this in the first place? Finally she threw up her head from the paper. “Is this really necessary?”

“If you’re fine with an empty tree, you don’t have to...” Joyce tutted before sipping from her cup. “Need I remind you that this should have been done yesterday ago?”

An empty tree was her threat, and it was implied as a choice, but Emily had dealt with enough scoldings to know that “choices” given by parents usually had only one right answer. Need Emily also consider how most of those scoldings were from her newest mommy.

But a watchful eye continued to stalk until the pencil started moving again.

“What about you?” Emily slapped the tool into the table with an open palm. She looked over at Joyce. “Where’s *your* Christmas list?”

“Me?” Joyce put on an innocent look. “Emily, I already have everything I could ever want. It’d just be selfish to ask for more!”

Emily slid the paper forward and away to the other side of the table. “Well that’s good, because I have everything that I want too.” She smugly crossed her arms.

But Santa’s not-so-inconspicuous helper suddenly gave Emily a worrying side-eye; lasers burned the side of her head, and Joyce’s deafening silence signaled how much she appreciated the

push-back. It would appear that Joyce had come down with a terrible case of “Rules for thee but not for me.” Somehow Emily was dealing with the side effects of it...

“I bet you can think of some stuff,” Joyce advised in a calm voice. It was as humorously restrained as it was genuinely concerning.

Looking the complete opposite way with a nervous twitch in her fingers, Emily’s arm slowly extended toward the unfinished list. “M-maybe...” She gulped before going back to writing. Though, only a small handful of items down the list, Emily looked back up from her own manufactured greed. “Wait...what *can* I ask for...?”

“What can you?” Joyce repeated, tilting out her head. “Things you’d like for Santa to bring you, sweetheart.”

“N-no...like...*who* is asking Santa right now? Me? Or...” Luckily there was no diaper on to remind her. “The other me...?”

Joyce opened her mouth to respond, but her jaw hung oddly in place without a sound coming out. Quickly it closed with a difficult expression on her face. “Oh, you mean like that...”

Quietly, Emily nodded back.

“Well,” Joyce started by putting her mug down, “Let me just see what you have writt—”

“*No!*” The knee jerk response came in full force. Emily with an indignant look was back to throwing her entire upper half over the paper yet again. “You can’t see it yet!”

And Joyce blinked, unsure whether to laugh or take her seriously. “Uh, in that case, can you at least tell me what *kind* of stuff you’re writing down?” She was half standing and half crawling on the couch; one foot on the floor and her other knee pressing into the cushions.

“...Uhm...” Emily defensively peeked through a small crevice between her arm and the coffee table. “Adult stuff...I guess.”

“Mmm...” Joyce nodded as she stared off into space. “Okay,” she said. She nodded affirmatively. “Go at least halfway down the list.”

“H-*half?*” Did Joyce forget how many lines lined paper had?

“Or a third, but then I get to see it~” Joyce sang teasingly, right as Emily slid her bottom down to the other corner of her workspace. “And Emily, don’t forget: Santa’s supposed to know about *anything* that you want, understood?”

“I think Santa would rather I be reasonable...” Emily mumbled as she scribbled, glancing at her screen for ideas.

“No, she wouldn’t,” Joyce copped back with a frown.

Between bits of banter, TV, cozy lounging and nothing else, a wonderfully quiet afternoon went by them.

“Done.”

Joyce, laying on her side, looked up at Emily holding out a folded piece of paper.

Then with a deathly stare, Emily asked, “And it goes *straight* to Santa, right?”

With a bright smile Joyce pinched along the same crease where Emily held it and plucked it free, keeping all the written contents unseen. “Straight to the North Pole,” Joyce answered with unwavering certainty. Though deep down, a shadow of herself felt perturbed, wondering just why her funny munchkin was suddenly so gravely serious about the make-believe...

But the moment Joyce answered and tucked away the list, Emily sighed with a melted facade, collapsing into the couch. “*Done...*” she moaned as a mumble through the cushions.

“Thank you for all your hard work,” Joyce giggled. She started stroking the back of Emily’s head. “Is it really that hard thinking of stuff you want?”

Before she answered, Emily propelled herself from the plush padding. “YES! *You* try asking for a *bajillion* different things you haven’t even considered yourself wanting until you started thinking that you might have wanted them!”

“Sounds like you could’ve been practicing...” Joyce whistled not-so-inconspicuously.

“And if I did, then by now I would’ve run out of things to ask for,” Emily deflected. Forget being a beggar though when there was the stress of also being a giver. What was she supposed to get Joyce...?

“Whatever the outcome may have been,” Joyce tactfully side-stepped the incriminating fact, “Thank you for writing your list for me. Now we’re gonna need to have another big discussion.”

Instinctively, Emily’s bare feet gingerly pushed against the cushions so she could shimmy herself farther down the other end. “...What?”

“Decorating,” Joyce said after she spat out a laugh. “We need Christmas decorations; don’t act so scared!”

“How am I supposed to know that’s all you wanna say?” Emily tucked herself away defensively. “You can’t go using words like ‘big’ and ‘discussion’ without implying some heavy stuff!” Lord knows the number of discussions they’ve had already...

“Well,” Joyce suspensefully started. She leaned forward to set down her mug, then she started creeping toward Emily, one feline palm-fall at a time. “We need to decide lots of very *big* and important things.” She planted her hand by Emily’s shoulder and hung over her like a canopy. “What kind of tree we wanna get, ornaments, lights, garland, knick-knacks, stockings, maybe a blanket...” Among maybe some other things that for the sake of surprises Joyce didn’t want to mention right now...

“Wait,” Emily said blankly. All it took was one blink and whatever sexual tension Joyce had made from her advances had gone out the window. “Like, a real tree? From a farm?”

“The building would allow it,” Joyce said, “but it might be a bit messy... If I’m being honest, I was thinking more of an artificial one. Is that okay with you?”

“Kay,” Emily smiled.

Joyce smiled right back.

Easy. Done.

“Tell you what: you can have my mom and dad’s tree to look forward to. They still go pick one out and everything.”

“Chop it down, too?” Emily patted Joyce’s shoulders with her palms, and Joyce obliged.

“Nnnope!” Joyce huffed as she yonked Emily up by the arms. “But Dad’s always the one to carry it in. John helps too, though.” Joyce glanced over at the time. “Think we can move this chit-chat over to the nursery?”

It was asked as casually as could be, but it didn't stop Emily from clamming up. "Uhm, yeah, that's fine..."

"I hope it's gonna be better than just 'fine'," Joyce playfully taunted, then led Emily by the hand down the hall. "Do you wanna get your PJs on early? She's not gonna mind you getting cozy."

"No, I wanna dress normally..." Emily mumbled, but she was already starting to lay down on the table.

"There's nothing wrong with you wearing bedtime clothes, Em..." Joyce lectured whilst she tried to suffocate the urge to smirk. "Sometimes I think I'm just gonna need to make this decision for you..." Mommy's usually get their babies dressed for bed before leaving them with the babysitter, right?

"Is she gonna...change me?"

Coincidentally, Joyce was already unfolding a diaper. A reluctant sigh left her breath. A jealous one. "If you're okay with it, and she is too...then yes, she will." Joyce wasted no time in stripping her lower half. "As much as I wanna monopolize you," Joyce paused for many attentive kisses, "she needs some practice and exposure if we're really gonna try this out for real."

For real. And that's what still wasn't hitting Emily yet. Another evolution in their dynamic. Trynamic, was it now? Wild... Absolutely unreal.

"Otherwise we'll need to look into some longer-lasting diapers and more boosters," Joyce nonchalantly supposed, putting a horrid image of herself in Emily's mind.

"I'd rather not..." Emily hesitantly advised from the changing table. Her bum fell back down on a cushy cloud.

"Neither would I," Joyce agreed with a few oncoming spritz of powder. "I'd hate to break our diaper rash-free streak..." She started massaging the sweet baby smell into Emily. Soon she was smelling fresh and feeling clean, all enclosed by four new tapes on her front. "So, that's a 'no' on the PJs?" She hoisted Emily off the table.

"Yes, it is a big fat N-O," Emily answered quite firmly. "I'm not getting changed."

And Emily saw it as a textbook moment to be getting pushback from her parent-slash-partner, but it was coincidentally also a perfect case for upset expectations.

“Okie-dokie!” Joyce chipperly nodded, then steered Emily out of the nursery. The quiet, uncertain body language Emily was putting off didn’t go unnoticed. “What?”

Scanning Joyce from head to toe, trying to spot the catch with no success, she mumbled, “...Nothing...”

If the doorbell hadn’t rang maybe there would have been a chance for Emily to stumble upon the pitfall she wasn’t seeing.

“Here already?” Joyce peeked around the corner. “Emily? I’m gonna go start getting dinner prepared after I buzz her in. Can you let her in once she comes up?”

Just like that her mind changed tracks. “Sure,” she twirled her foot on the floor while she watched Joyce briefly chat on the phone. Once she hung up, “Want some help with dinner tonight?”

“I really appreciate the offer,” Joyce said as she opened the fridge. “But I think you might be a little too preoccupied tonight. Maybe tomorrow if you still wanna?”

“Preoccupied with what?” Emily frowned as she watched. “Wait, what are we having tonight?”

“Curry,” Joyce answered with a pot in hand. Soon another chime rang throughout the home. “Guests are here!”

And Emily walked off for the door. One footstep at a time. Listening to her footfalls, drowned out somewhat by a staticy...crinkly...noise. Something amassed between her legs, taped around her hips, and without a single piece of clothing to cover it. Coincidentally Joyce listened every step of the way, hearing her crinkling pace slow to a crawl and finally a full stop. Right until...a hurried swish-swish of creases and crunches came barreling back into the kitchen. Joyce was giving her a simple, wordless smile. Emily stood by the kitchen entrance with a hanging jaw and reddening face. Her body reacted faster than her flustered mind could come up with the words.

“Y-yy...” Emily moaned, then groaned. “C-can you answer it, please?”

“What? Why?” Joyce did what she did best: play dumb. “Honey, it’s not polite to keep our guests waiting!”

Emily sputtered disbelief, warbled her lips, then with a huff hurried off, racing right past the entrance and for the bedroom. Right until a piercing call froze her feet where they stood.

“And *no* shortcuts to the bedroom, please!”

The same stop-and-go of frantic toddler sounds ended with Emily giving Joyce an annoyed look all over again.

“What is it?” Joyce shrugged. “Emily, please go answer the door? Just go turn the handle like Mommy always does.”

“Y-you tricked me!” Emily accused with an outstretched finger. The victim, in only a shirt and diaper, looked quite betrayed.

“Tricked you how?” Joyce tried not to giggle. “I asked if you wanted to change clothes, didn’t I?”

“You said *PJs!* Not normal clothes!” Emily whined. A small knock on the front door was heard.

“PJs *are* normal,” Joyce rolled her eyes. “Now please, no more tantrums. Please go answer the door.”

“B-but what if it’s not her...?!” Emily started clutching on the corner of the entryway.

As if there was any chance that it wasn’t... “There’s a peephole, sweetheart. If it’s not, come get me.”

“B-but you should answer just to be safe,” Emily said, then even nodded like an imaginary friend rallying her side of the court.

“And if I’m the one who has to open that door, then you’re the only one going without dessert tonight,” Joyce sang simply, then turned on the faucet. “You have until I’m done washing this carrot~!” AKA, two seconds.

Emily worriedly glanced down the hall at the door, sitting there ominously, harboring monsters from the other side. She looked down at herself, padded and vulnerable. A rabbit ready to be preyed upon by the wolves. And there her shepherd was, intentionally ignoring her cries for help as she was about to be feasted on! Hell, she wasn’t being ignored; she was being deliberately forced! What kind of creature threatens dessert?!

A few pouting stomps later and Emily was in front of the door. Her trembling hand touched the handle, flinching backwards like the metal was firing off electricity. But the only thing going haywire were the synapses in her head, imagining all the worst-case scenarios...

Just do it...! Just do it...! For dessert...!

With a huff and a puff, she turned the handle and opened the door., and there she was.

Amy.

Head, shoulders, arms, torso, hips, legs, feet, toes, and all.

“Hey there!” Amy greeted first, despite being the visitor, but her friendly look quickly melted into one of curiosity from what she was seeing. Just as there was Amy on one side of the doorframe, right on the other, there was Emily.

“H-hey...!” Emily’s hand waved along the side of the door.

Head and hand only.

“Is...everything okay?” Amy chuckled, slowly stepping inside, craning her neck right in tune with Emily opening the door wider and wider until she was parallel with the wall. If Amy peeked any more, the diapered girl would only have the shadows to try and mask her.

“Yeah, doing good...you?” Emily did her best to play things off. Though, every lingering pause between Amy’s answers implied that her inconspicuous grade was maybe less than passing.

“I’m...good,” Amy said, still trying not to be blunt about the odd scenario. She was working off her boots while Emily was still trying to hide every part of herself. “But, er, I mean more like right now...” she traced her finger around the entire ensemble that was Emily’s apparent affair with the front door.

“Oh, I’m just...uhm...I...dunno...” Emily shrugged, not that Amy could see the full gesture due to it being in hiding.

“Is it alright to shut the door?” Amy asked, and for good reason. Usually now minus ten seconds ago would’ve been probably the most socially acceptable time to close the door after letting someone in. Proper etiquette just wasn’t Emily’s wheelhouse right now...

“Y-yeah...” Emily slowly nodded, though she didn’t move any more than that. “Joyce is in the kitchen, by the way...”

“Okay,” Amy nodded, but once she was in her socks she was standing idly on the raised hardwood floor. Waiting. “Gonna come with?” she chuckled.

“Uhm...” What crafty thing could she say to stall or misdirect Amy this time? At least to buy her enough time to put on some pants...! “...No...”

Amy nodded, then exhaled. “You really can be a bundle of nerves, huh?” She giggled as she stepped forward, back down onto the cold slate floor.

“W-wait, wait, Amy, I-I’ll just be a—!” She didn’t get a chance when Amy spared only a small effort in forcing the door out of Emily’s grip. She watched in slow motion as the massive hunk of material swung shut with a solid, damning close. Her shroud was gone and the shadows lost their corner to creep and conceal Emily’s underwear, leaving her frozen and petrified by her diaper sitting on full display.

Instantly her hands dropped to block the view of her diaper, along with stretching the hem of her shirt that didn’t even remotely make the cut for hiding much of anything. Immediately though, Amy made a play out of Joyce’s own book by slipping her hands between Emily’s arms and sides, forcing her hands up and away as she was forced into a brief hug.

“Does this make it less awkward now?” Amy laughed. “Aren’t your bare feet cold standing down here? My socks barely make it warm enough. Shoo! Let’s stand somewhere where we don’t need shoes, please!” She physically took Emily by the arms, forcing her even more into the open by situating themselves smack dab in the middle of the hallway. “And stop trying to cover up,” she frowned, “you’re acting like I’m seeing you in the nude!”

“I-I *am!*” Emily finally stuttered a complaint, freshly burning from the coals of Joyce’s decree. “*Joyce* made me answer the door like this!”

Amy made a goofy look. “And what if it wasn’t me answering?”

“That’s what *I* said!” Emily cried her complaint, finally glad to have someone who just *got* it. At least Amy could understand how absurd Joyce could be at times!

“Where’s she now?” Amy was already turning her head and pondering a destination.

“In the kitchen...” Emily grumpily answered, then lowered her voice. “*Eavesdropping...*”

Amy sagely nodded, then made way to the kitchen, but she briefly stopped to comment suddenly and boldly, “Oh and by the way, love the diaper! So you!”

And while Emily mentally tackled how to respond to something so bizarre, Amy already moved on to bigger fish. “Joyce? Joooyce? There you are!”

“Hey Amy,” Joyce smiled over her shoulder. The tap-tap-tap of her knife against the cutting board sounded like a machine with speed and constant rhythm.

“Hello to you too!” She set her handbag on the table before drifting closer, followed by Emily positioning herself behind the island; the only way she could totally block her lower half from view without making it totally obvious. “Now I can see why Emily answered the door for me.”

“And did she use her manners?” Joyce asked, Emily flinched into a blush, and Amy blocked her grin with a knuckle.

“Yes, she used only the best of manners,” Amy answered in an adamant voice. “If I had to give her a grade, it’d be an A-plus!”

“Oh wow, that high, huh?” Joyce remarked, and Emily was already melting from the overdose of attention she was getting.

“Yep, so she should be duly rewarded for doing such a good job, you know?” Amy advised, sounding to Emily what felt stern? “After all, as flattered as I’d be if she was that excited to see me, I can’t imagine Emily forgetting to wear pants before answering the door all on her own?”

Still with Joyce’s back turned, Amy discreetly winked with a thumb’s up at Emily for emotional support. The moment she turned, Emily tried not to shed a tear, nor did Joyce show her own tearful look verging on the burst of laughter.

If only she knew...

If only Amy had a clue...

Rule of Babysitting Number 1:

Learn to have *far* less faith in Emily...

“You know me far too well...” Joyce finally managed to speak. “Don’t worry, Emily’s earned herself a *really* yummy dessert tonight after dinner.”

“Some might argue that should be a given, though,” Amy plainly and tactfully pointed out, whilst a small Emily wanted to rally with cheers right beside her.

Yeah! You tell her!

At this rate they should unionize! What was Joyce gonna do, fire her baby girl?

“And yet if I gave Emily ice cream every night we’d go bankrupt,” Joyce shrugged helplessly.

Amy shook her head as she spoke helplessly, “Unfortunately I cannot speak to that. I’ll have to assume that it’s a big business lie... But moving on! Thank you very much to you both for having me over!”

“Of course,” Joyce said. She finished dumping a board of chopped veggies into the pot.

“But most importantly, an extra big thank you too, Emily,” Amy pointedly said, staring right at the skittish girl.

Hiding partially behind the counter had at least something going for her, so Emily could at least appear like “one of the adults” in the room. Granted, depending on where you were looking from, that wasn’t quite so true...

“...Mm...” Emily hummed as much as she avoided eye contact. What was she supposed to say? *Thanks for wanting to train to be my babysitter!* Well, come to think of it, that probably *was* what she was supposed to say. Would her nerves allow her to, though? To answer a question with a question: do diapers stay dry?

“One second, I just need to...” Joyce explained as she was already halfway out of the kitchen, but her feet froze and her head turned. “Actually...” A pleasant smile that only caused nerves for Emily formed across her face. “This is a great chance! Hey Emily?” Why did she have to call her...? It was with that stupidly sweet voice of hers. The kind that screamed: “I’m only sounding nice because I’m gonna ask something really demanding of you!”

Emily in response sunk a little bit lower.

“Yeah...?” Emily hesitantly answered. Amy listened on with open and curious ears.

“Think you could take Amy to your room and go get some of your crayons?”

Their room? “What? We don’t have crayons in our—”

“No-no, *your* room,” Joyce softly interjected.

The Nursery.

Emily bit her tongue, debating whether to argue against needing crayons whatsoever, whatever Joyce was ultimately getting at. Fine, she would get them, but bringing Amy along too...?

“I...A-Amy, you can wait here. I’ll be right back,” Emily said before starting her brisk crinkle away.

“Amy’s gonna come too!” Joyce called after her. And being ahead of the pack, no one but Emily herself was a witness to her embarrassed grimace. Sure enough she could hear one of the grown-ups right on her tail.

“I don’t mind a messy room, if that’s what’s got you so fidgety?” Amy remarked beside her, and Emily sadly closed in on the shut door.

“That’s...” Emily sighed, gave up, and opened the door. “...not it.” The darkness as the final barrier gave way when Emily stretched her arm inside and flicked the light switch. Immediately Emily walked as quickly as she could for the toy chest on the other side of the room.

Get the crayons and go. Get the crayons and go...!

But her movements slowed down as a layer of hair-raising cringey embarrassment seeped all over her. The cause? Amy’s immediate reaction.

“Oh wow~!” Amy slowly followed in from behind. She kept her hands close to her torso like she was surrounded by national treasures. She was looking everywhere and seeing everything, and just knowing that was making the fear of revealing it all linger far more than Emily would have liked. “See! I knew it wasn’t gonna be messy!”

In spite of the surprised noises she made and the obvious fascination, her words were obviously subdued. Amy was reacting like she was seeing a remodeled kitchen; not a totally unexpected nursery sized for an adult.

“Y-you can be honest, you know...” Emily mumbled in a defeatist tone. She had her back to the rest of the room and her face hovering over a box full of stuffed toys, searching for the one small and hard thing that they kept in here.

“If I *am* being honest,” Amy sighed a tune of truth that admittedly made Emily’s stomach sink, “I’m an awful bit jealous by how much Joyce seems to pamper you...” Amy bent over, clutching the giant bear’s stuffed cheeks and rocking its head from side to side. Under her breath a comment went almost unheard. “*Where the hell did she even find something like this...?*”

In her haste to leave this place as quickly as possible, a few passing shadows caught by Amy’s peripherals made her notice just how quickly Emily was flinging fluffy friend after friend from their home.

“I-I can find it in just a second if you wanna wait outside,” Emily hastily said. *Where the hell were they...?!* The social poison of onlookers was starting to get to her more and more... A stranger was in one of her most vulnerable places, seeing all the things she didn’t want anyone else to see. Diapers were one thing. Onesies were another, but a whole nursery? Whatever Amy said she was fine with, obviously an entire room imitating the infantile was far from it. Her reasonable reactions and simple comments said more than enough. She was suppressing what Emily was neck-deep in feeling.

Weird.

Strange.

Creepy.

Gross.

Why did Joyce even make her come in here? What was the point? Could she just ask Amy to leave? Was the rest of the night ruined?

“Scooch a little?” Amy asked whilst she gently pushed on Emily’s knee, inevitably forcing her over to the right side of the toy chest. Amy sat down on her knees and joined her on the left. Without even looking at Emily, much more delicately her hands lifted rabbit from monkey and cat from dog, setting them aside like a surgeon handling organs. “I’m gonna go out on a limb and guess that Joyce bought all these on her own, right?”

“Uhm...yeah...”

Emily went right back to searching as fast as she could, but a sudden bump on her shoulder made her look at Amy. She was clearly frowning.

“Hey, what gives?”

“Wh-what? Nothing, I just wanna hurry and find this...” Emily tried to start digging again, but another shoulder bump stopped her.

“No, it’s not *nothing*,” Amy mimicked what a far more dreary, dull, and boring version of what Emily might have sounded like. “You’ve been rubber-banding between silly and sulking, and now I really wanna know. What’s going on? Don’t tell me I’m back to square one with you?”

“I-I’m fine, it’s just... I-I know it’s weird, okay? I’m sorry Joyce made you come in here, and I don’t wanna drag you in here and force you to see a-all this stuff so I’m trying to hurry...”

“Emily, I’ve put you in a diaper.”

The pair blinked at each other in silence. One stayed quiet for dramatic effect, and the other was trying not to blush. And failing.

“You’ve already told me about your nursery, your stuffed friend, how Joyce makes up *all* these rules that are just designed to get you in trouble...” Amy glanced down at Emily, then stifled a laugh. “Em, you answered the door in just a diaper!”

“I-I...”

Like claws, Amy swung in her hands to clasp on Emily’s shoulders. “Did you think I was expecting something other than a nursery? Emily, I’ve said it before. This is all *fine* with me. New? Yes. Different? Definitely yes, but that’s all. So stop getting hung up! Should I ask Joyce about this? Do spankings get the jitters out of you?” She kept inching closer in increments. “Huh? Huh?”

“O-okay! Okay...!” Emily finally laughed on her back before their noses could touch. It was getting old, but yet again, mostly Joyce, but this time Amy, was right...

“So we’re good now?” Amy asked with a warning look. Her hands looked ready to start something devious if she didn’t like the answer that she heard...

“Y-yes...” Emily said, and there was already a small amount of weight floating off of her. “...Sorry abou—”

“No apologies either,” Amy sharply interrupted. “Only for when, you know, you actually do something bad.”

“...” Emily had to go quiet for far longer just to stop herself from saying something that she wasn’t supposed to on reflex. “...Okay.”

“Okay,” Amy repeated, only far more peppier. “Now let’s shift roles a tiny bit. Why don’t you,” Amy had Emily stand and pointed her toward the rest of the room, “go and pick up all of your friends you just threw to the wolves for me? If you’re not playing then they’re not staying.” A rhyme so sublime that even Amy couldn’t help but make a small, self-satisfied nod.

Slowly Emily started scooping up the toys, but she kept watching Amy going about her own flow. As simple as she looked, it was exactly because of the way she seemed so calm and casual that it threw the girl for a loop. For Joyce it just seemed natural. After all, being a mommy was practically innate, or at least a huge part of her person. It wasn’t the same for Amy though, right? Whether she knew how to hide her true feelings or roll with the punches, Emily’s caution came from disbelief born out of Amy’s open-minded charm.

“Ta-dah!” Amy finally cheered with the shining grail held up in her hand. “At the very bottom, no less. Only after she watched Emily dump her armful of toys back in the pen did she stand up. “Seriously, who keeps these in a toy chest? It’s like a needle in a haystack...!”

All Emily could do was shrug. “Joyce put them back there, so...”

Somehow that put a spin of positivity on Amy’s face. “Even better! That makes it a whole lot easier to criticize!” Before they made their way out, Amy gave the rest of the room one more cursory glance. “I didn’t see any coloring books in the chest; that’s what you wanted to play with, right?”

“No, I didn’t even want the crayons to begin with,” Emily explained, but it was a bit hard fully masking her whining attitude. “As per usual, Joyce has me do stuff without ever explaining it...” Though to be more specific: only in cases when babying Emily...

Amy pursed her lips and the side-eye came in full swing. “And act as you might, but I somehow don’t think you really mind that part so much...”

“W-well...” Emily cast her eyes the other way. “It can be fun...sometimes...” After all, what better feeling was there than leaving it all up to someone else?

“An important tid-bit I’ll remember for later,” Amy chuckled. “Okay, out we go.” They left the room and turned the light off with it and walked back to the kitchen. “Joyce! We found your impossible-to-find crayons!”

“Why does everything out of your mouth have to have some kind of comment or slight in it?” Joyce pleasingly took the pack before setting it down on the counter. Eerily, for Emily, sitting right next to it was a blank white page...

“It’s all well-intended constructive criticism, I swear!” Amy professed. “Crayons can be kept elsewhere is all I mean, but we can save that for another time.”

“Yes, another time,” Joyce agreed, or at least seemed to. “But for now, since I’m gonna need a little longer with dinner, did you want something to drink?”

“I can get some water, that’s fine,” Amy volunteered herself.

“Cups are up there,” Joyce pointed out the cabinet.

“Water does sound good...” Emily said the same and followed up closely, but a cup was already being held out for her. One with a spout over the covered top.

“And this house is a no-spill zone for you, missy,” Joyce said as she gave Emily the sippy cup, only smirking after getting a tell-tale squirm of pleased embarrassment in return.

Emily had hardly any idea what she was drinking, so she did the most logical thing and sucked from her sippy, tasting a familiar tart apple. “I want water,” Emily softly declared.

“You can have all the water you want after you’re done with your juice,” Joyce decided without another word. She was already back to stove work, treating the matter like a secondary priority. After all, Mommy knows best. “You two can head into the living room, if you want,” Joyce told Amy.

“If that’ll get us out of your hair, sure,” Amy agreed. “Sound good to you, Em? Wanna hang out someplace else?”

“...” Emily took her mouth off the spout. “Sure, that’s fine.”

“Oh, Joyce, do I need a cover or anything?” Amy asked only after glancing again at Emily’s deliberately childish cup.

“Not unless you planned on spilling your drink?” Joyce lightly teased. “I wasn’t joking when I said that Emily’s spilled her drink before.”

“*Joooyce!*” Emily whined the way that only a mother could love. To everyone else though it was stuck somewhere between endearing and plain entertaining.

“Which reminds me, Emily, can you take those crayons and paper for me with you? I need you to get started on that list for me.”

“Huh?”

“Sweetie, your Christmas list,” Joyce repeated, plain and matter-of-factly.

“B-but I just did one?”

“I know you did, but Santa needs two from you, you know? One for big girl gifts, which you already did, and then one for...appropriate gifts!” As if to imply the former was far more wishful for a girl kept in diapers...

“*Two* Christmas lists?” Amy commented in surprise. “You’ve really got her work cut out for her?”

“That’s why I’m sending you with her, on top of making sure she has someone to keep an eye on her. But by all means, please feel free to help her come up with some stuff! All I know is that Santa says he pays the most attention to the most pretty and creative-looking lists!”

Hence all the colors Joyce was now giving her to use...

“Ooou,” Amy nodded. “Guess we better get to work then, huh, Em! Let’s...” then she stopped and grabbed the crayons and paper, glancing at the coloring book drawing on the fridge, and finally Emily’s presently dry diaper, holding a sippy cup with both hands. “Let’s give Mommy some space and give Santa some good ideas for what to get you, okay?”

Oh God...did she just use the ‘M’ word...?!

Far more demure with cheeks changing into Rudolph’s nose, Emily took the lead to the living room. “K-kay...”

And as one last sign of approval, Amy’s head was the last thing to leave the kitchen, exchanging a wink with a fat thumb’s up from Joyce. Her lips were spread from ear to ear.

Emily was the first to arrive at the living room, and she was the last to sit down. “So...how, uhm should we...?”

“You are the artist, my dear,” Amy flicked her hand and sipped from her glass of *laissez faire*. “I’m just for input and inspiration.” Though Amy could see she may have spoken a bit too cryptically when Emily was still standing in place with all her materials bundled against her. Crayons, paper, sippy cup, and all. “Okay, first sit wherever you’re comfy.”

Sit. Right. She moved as mechanically and inorganically as she could. As if she hadn’t done this once already earlier today... Her knees were back on the floor and she flicked open the pack of writing utensils. Naturally, she pulled out the black one for easiest readability.

“Oh, Em, could you hand me that one for a second?” Amy asked with an outstretched hand.

“Huh? Sure,” Emily handed over the black crayon.

She then proceeded to watch Amy fling it over her shoulder and hear the distant clacking of crayon hitting the hardwood floor.

“What was that?” Joyce’s voice called from the other end.

“Nothing, just the creative process!” Amy cheerily filled in the blank. Then she looked at Emily with a far more disappointed look. “Black? *Really?* You’re not using a pencil for a reason, squirt. We’re trying to have fun here, not write a report!” Amy cut herself off with a sigh and shouted down the hall yet again. “Joyce! Where are your decorations? How are we supposed to write a Christmas list under these conditions?!”

“We just finished Thanksgiving, Amy; I’m sure Emily can manage!”

“And now you know what it’s like to work with unreasonable clients,” Amy jokingly mumbled to Emily, who was all sorts of confused, but smirking nonetheless.

And Emily thought better than picking another relatively bland color, lest it be lost to the floorboards again, so she grabbed a bright red. Christmas was coming, after all... She started the list with a simple number one.

“So...what do you think is a good idea to ask for?” Emily asked.

“Mmm...probably things that baby Em might like, which is you, which is why you probably have the best idea,” Amy teased, leaving Emily stranded on an island in a lonely sea devoid of ideas.

Things that she would like as a baby? Or a kid? Emily exhaled while the gears inside her head were turning. Stopping to consider what babyish things she'd actually like left her feeling quite conflicted. *Did* she even like baby things? The coddling, the embarrassing, the clothes, diapers, cribs, furniture...she did like that all in their own unique ways, but what else? So much of the fun came from being surprised by all of it. Didn't writing it down on a list sort of defeat the purpose? What would *Joyce* want to give her? Was that the frame of mind she needed? Things like rattles, tiny xylophones, play food...it fit the image, sure, but to Emily it just didn't click...

She *liked* being treated like a baby, or maybe somewhere between that and a toddler, but...she never exactly becomes one. Her mind stays the same. Sure she might become a bit more bubbly or daring, but she still walks and talks like an adult...

“Nobody said you had to be realistic about your ideas, either,” Amy added on a sober note. “I think the whole point is for you to have fun with it, right?”

Fun... Maybe things she could benefit from...?

“How about this,” Amy started, “what is the *biggest* thing that *Joyce*— or, that *Mommy* does that upsets you the most?”

The most...? It was almost embarrassing how quickly the answer came to her. “Bedtimes,” Emily answered quite adamantly. Bedtimes...what would a kid ask for, then? Wait—! With a wide-eyed look of eureka, Emily said, “*No more* bedtimes!” She was already writing before she could notice Amy's doubtful, but amused reaction.

“Glad to see we're leaning on the imaginative side...” Amy mumbled with a giggle.

And on instinct, the moment she finished writing, an urge compelled Emily to put down the color red and pick up another. *Green*. In the same vein of protesting The Man, or in this case The Mommy, Emily was already writing down her next “gift”. Quietly, Amy hovered over her shoulder just to read.

No more sippy cups.

Now steam was blowing and the engine was running. Amy didn't need to speak up for a whole five more minutes.

No more having to stay in the bathroom to dry off

Dessert with dinner every night

Only clothes that cover my diaper

Ask me what I want to drink before you get it for me

No more blocks on the computer

Only one dentist visit every three years (I'm compromising on this)

Only say nice things about me

...

..

.

“Uhh...Emily, honey, I think the train might be running off the tracks a little here...” Amy wasn't smiling so much anymore, starting to wonder just how Emily's sudden 95 Theses was going to reflect on her part...

“Does it not look good?” Emily asked, only stopping now to consider her color coordination. To a rebel and anarchist such as herself, backing down on denouncing the rule of law wasn't even a consideration...

Amy couldn't help but also notice how Emily had doubled back to the bedtime “gift”, circling the item many times over and accenting it with stars and sparkles.

Yeah, not a chance...

“Why don't we reel it in a tiny bit?” Amy suggested. “Maybe shift gears. Was there stuff you liked having in your childhood, maybe? Like any toys or games?”

“Ahm...oh! Yeah!” Emily suddenly bounced on her knees then swiped another crayon. “I haven't had time for it in forever, but I used to play video games with my cousins. Maybe I could ask for that?”

New Video Game thing

Amy tried to hide her sigh of relief.

Thank God, at least she'll get one thing for Christmas...

More and more things kept on coming to mind and Emily kept on writing and writing. And Amy nearby kept on making comments or giving feedback.

“Oh, that’s a cool one there.”

“I have a friend who mentioned this for their son; you should specify a color that you’d want.”

“That’s a really great idea!”

All the same Emily was starting to offer up her writing for more critiques. She’d stand on her knees and pin the paper against her chest for Amy to read, who would study the crayon ramblings like a sacred text worthy of scientific critique.

By the end of their writing session, the juices in Emily’s head were flowing as much as the ones coming out of her sippy cup. Every so often she’d get a tap on the shoulder from Amy with a friendly reminder.

“Don’t forget about that juice right there.”

“The sooner it’s gone the sooner you can get that water.”

“Thirsty at all?”

Finally some distinctly wonderful scents coming from the kitchen brought both women to their feet.

Amy started walking when Emily spoke up from behind. “Oh, uhm... I'm just gonna finish writing something. I'll be there in a second...” Emily quickly dropped back down to the floor.

“Okie-dokie. You’ve got two minutes before we send a search party, though!” Amy teasingly warned. In the kitchen Joyce was already preparing three plates of finished food. “Mmm. Smells awfully good!”

“It’s the least that I can do,” Joyce said without a second thought. “Tonight may be practice for you, but I really do appreciate you helping Emily get a list together... Not that I want to know everything in advance, but she wasn’t happy last time I tried peeking today...”

“And yet you’ll see it all in the end, anyway?” Amy curiously smirked. But Joyce wagged her finger.

“I most certainly will not. Santa will, however!”

“Sorry about that,” Emily announced upon her arrival as she made a beeline for one of the kitchen chairs. Promptly she sat down and tucked herself in and against the table. “It smells super good!”

“I’m afraid I’m not gonna want to go back to my own cooking after tonight...” Amy laughed as Joyce walked over to the table.

Emily was already starting to slouch the closer she got, especially with that telltale wordless smile of hers... Emily's chair was suddenly pulled back out.

“On your feet, chick-a-dee.”

“I-I’m fine...” Emily groaned back, but Joyce then physically hoisted her onto her feet.

“And I wanna make sure of that. Or actually, Amy, do you think you wanna give it your first try?”

“Try what?” Amy asked, stepping forward. Emily was trying not to tremble.

Please don't tell her...!

“Emily, just like any other little one in diapers, is still going to need to be checked and changed. Something tells me she’s been deliberately hiding those sorts of signs from you...”

“She was?” Amy asked, totally unaware.

“No I wasn’t...!” Emily complained.

“Then good job for using your diapers so easily!” Joyce praised, but it hardly felt any different from a loss to Emily. “But Amy, if you come here I can show you how I normally check her.

This isn't something she's going to self-report, nor do I want her to, so don't be afraid of doing this regularly."

"Uhm...alright. But...is...Emily really okay with that...?" Amy talked a lot about Emily being carefree, but the implications and undertones here weren't as easy to read for a novice like Amy.

And rather than answering, Joyce deferred to the diapered girl in question. "Is it okay, Emily?"

She had her hand over her quivering mouth, truly wishing Joyce had done the heavy-lifting for her. What was she supposed to say? "Amy, please stick your hand in my diaper like my Mommy always does?" She took a breath before speaking up in a quiet voice. "I-I...don't mind."

"And there you have it," Joyce nodded simply. "Of course, Amy, if there's anything you don't feel comfortable with, please speak up. But otherwise..." she gestured with her palm toward Emily, who was looking anywhere but at the two women about to see how much she had wet herself.

Amy was reluctant for sure, but even in her hesitation she slowly reached out. Only now were there a few subtle differences she was picking up on. The crotch of Emily's diaper wasn't folded inward like it was before. Almost as if it had expanded and filled out... Her bum still crinkled, but not as much...? So this is what changed. These were the signs...

"For now, the best would probably be pulling out her waistband," Joyce explained, and Amy obliged. She hooked the disposable elastic on Emily's underwear, brushing the flat face of her finger against Emily's skin, pulling it out with a paper and crinkly stretch. She peered down into the diaper, sure enough seeing padding that looked a bit inflated and discolored...

"So I'd say that looks like she's close to needing a change, but not quite yet," Joyce explained. "It's not a science, but that can wait until after dinner."

"Huh...okay," Amy nodded. And of all people, Emily was the one to chime in.

"A-and uhm...don't feel like you need to...er...ask me, or anything..."

"See?" Joyce laughed after nudging Amy's arm. "She'll act as embarrassed as she wants to, but don't take it as pushback until she actually says something."

The mention of that echoed a private conversation Amy had earlier with Joyce.

If she uses her safeword, stop everything you're doing. As soon as that happens, she's a fully-fledged adult. She's just adult Emily again.

And all the babysitter could do was sigh.

“Liking something that you look like you hate... You're quite the perplexing toddler, little Emily...”

The three finally sat down for dinner at a far more normal pace, hitting conversation that kept Emily's diapers out of the discussion, thankfully. It was just three friends at the table right then, laughing and chatting.

All with a wet diaper hiding under the table.

Slated for a change after dinner, of course.

Or, more specifically, after dessert...