

56 - Meeting the Family

“I *told* her to leave them by the door...!” Joyce huffed with her clothes halfway off. “Are you okay? Wait...” the full scope finally dawned on her. “She...she saw you like this, didn’t she?”

And all Emily did was quiver her lips before moaning in a whine. “S-she just stood there and looked at me...! Who does that?!” Emily threw out her arms with trembling hands. There wasn’t as much of a barrier for modesty around Joyce. She dropped her hands back to her diaper tapes.

“I’ll be talking to her...” Joyce stared off into the mirror, but even then she had Emily by the wrists, raising her arms like a child who needed to keep their hands to themselves.

“I want the diaper off...” Emily sulked.

“It’s coming off...” Joyce assured.

“A-and...” Emily sighed, trying not to work herself up too much. “She saw me when I was wet...!”

There was a momentary pause from her caretaker, but she pulled Emily back in for a hug nonetheless. “Would it have made you feel better if you were in a dry diaper?” It was a very silly hill to park her bum on, but it didn’t stop Joyce from asking like a caring parent would.

“Y-...” Emily bit her lip, finally turning her gears. “I...yes, but...I guess the diaper part matters more...” Emily stared at herself in the mirror with a frown. “D-does it look different when it’s wet...?” She then put her hands back down to her disposable-covered hips. “I’ll help too...”

“You’re already being such a very good helper,” Joyce gently lifted Emily’s hands back up to her shoulders. “What happened wasn’t fair, and it’s not right. I’ll talk with my mom, but also don’t forget we still have rules, even under a different roof,” she tore the tension with the scritchng diaper tapes.

Emily did the only thing she could do. Sulk, while her diaper sunk between her legs and hit the floor. Finally, Emily frowned.

“What?” Joyce’s hand brushed Emily’s cheek.

“You’re not mad enough.”

“I’m not?” Joyce repeated, but she didn’t sound offended. “What, about the way my mom handled things?”

Wordlessly, and without eye contact, Emily nodded.

“I am very mad. As mad as I was the first time this happened,” Joyce explained in a level voice. “Frankly, maybe even more.” Just as fire and flames were about to burst from her sockets, she exhaled, then brushed her soft hair against Emily’s cheek as she bent over to rest her chin on Emily’s shoulder. “But I don’t want to be mad around you.”

“What?” Emily lifted her head. “Why? I want you to be.”

“Nope,” Joyce simply shook her head. “If I need to vent with you, I will,” she squeezed Emily tighter, “but otherwise you only get my good parts.”

“...Does that include not being stern?”

There was a soft, simple chuckle from Joyce. “No, not exactly.” *Sort of. Sort of not...* “Being stern is how I keep you such a good girl,” she grinned.

“Well,” Emily had a slightly discontent look, “good thing that’s what—”

“But I know you’re being the best girl that you can be,” Joyce smiled, and the silent teasing made the moment feel even better.

“...I *am* good,” Emily stressed, even standing on her toes.

“Yes, you can be,” Joyce nodded like the comparison was one to one, but the benefit of Emily not being an actual four year old meant she could distinguish semantics.

“*Am* good,” Emily repeated.

“Emily, if you were the perfect little girl, I don’t think you’d need a mommy,” Joyce lectured while she stripped. “Is that what you’re telling me? You don’t need a mommy?”

“What? I can be good *and* need a...” Thank goodness there were no recording devices, “...and need a mommy...!”

Joyce nodded while her hand sifted through the water. “Okay, but good girls have to do an awful lot... Do you do what your mommy tells you?”

On the inside the girl of a questionable good-ness level flinched. She halfway expected a killing blow from the start.

“Y-yes... Yeah, I do...” *I didn't expect to make it this far...*

“Do you go to bed when Mommy says so?”

“Yes.” Boom. Another easy one.

“You do?” Joyce innocently asked, like she might have misheard.

“Y...yes, I do,” Emily said, then insisted again when Joyce did her signature ‘don’t believe you but I’ll act like I do’ nod. “*I do!*”

“Okay, okay,” Joyce chuckled, still with a humoring tone, “I’ll give you that. Let’s consider some other points... Hm... Oh! Do you behave when you go to the dentist?”

“That’s not fair!” Only an actress or a truly upset girl could put on that kind of performance. Too bad Emily didn’t have an Oscar.

“It’s that kind of attitude that keeps me around, you know~” Joyce scolded in a sing-song voice. “I’m used to your temper tantrums, but that doesn’t mean anyone else should have to deal with them.”

“I don’t have tempers,” Emily quietly tantrumed.

“And I think I know the start of one when I see one,” Joyce taunted. “Bum in the bath, please,” she waved Emily along. “Maybe we can clean that attitude of yours too.”

“I don’t have an attitude...!” Emily insisted, finally laughing. She dipped a toe in the water, initially spiked by the intense heat, but it quickly simmered down into a comforting warmth.

Emily went in first, and so then did Joyce.

“Not quite like what we have at home, huh?” Joyce said as she maneuvered behind Emily. Soon the smaller woman slid slightly forward as Joyce’s chest went against Emily’s back, trapping her between her Mommy’s legs.

“Reminds me of your bath,” Emily sighed as she leaned back a bit harder, finally landing her head back on the crook of Joyce’s shoulder.

“My bath?” Joyce tried looking around and down at her. Staring off into space, Emily blinked.

“Ah,” with a dripping finger she pointed out into space, “right, *our* bathroom.”

“Mmm...no, I liked the first one better,” Joyce giggled. “*My* bathroom. The one I let my little girl use sometimes.”

“Weren’t you just trying to get me in bed with you and telling me that it’s *our* room?” Emily puffed her lips. Sitting in front meant she could keep all her expressions to herself, but Joyce had a knack for picking up on her tone.

“Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn’t,” Joyce chuckled again. With a nearby cup she scooped and slowly drizzled some water over Emily’s head. “Sometimes you’re my adorably attractive girlfriend,” drizzling water carried the suspense, “and other times you’re my little girl I can’t help but spoil.”

“Yeah, but you spoil your girlfriend, too,” Emily pointed out.

“True,” Joyce barely thought about it. “Guess that blurs the lines even more. There *will* be nights you’re in your crib, you know...”

And in a knee-jerk response Emily blurted, “What? No. Don’t wanna.” But before Joyce could answer, “I mean– I like sleeping in bed with you more...”

“I can’t tell if that’s being completely honest or trying to keep from going behind bars,” Joyce grinned.

“Little bit of both,” Emily was forthcoming and honest. As all good girls should be, of course. “Let’s be honest; there’s not a single night you wouldn’t want me in bed with you, is there?” Naturally, she sounded smug.

“Oh, I could think of plenty,” Joyce was just as confident, hence Emily’s confidence being shattered.

“Wh-what?”

“Hm? Oh, of course there are, hon. Christmas, for example?” she sighed just thinking about it, sounding like she was mulling over a small stressor from work. “Since we’re gonna be here for Christmas Eve and the day of, that does complicate things a tiny bit...”

“We can do gifts here, can’t we?” And just what gifts Emily could get for Joyce was suddenly a stressor. “And uhm...yeah, I guess I have to think a little bit about that some more...”

A kiss was delivered to her cheek. “Don’t stress,” Joyce softly commanded. “Emily, you’re already my gift. I know that sounds ridiculous, but you really are my present that keeps on giving. That’s why I don’t need anything else, and all the same anything you’d give me is more than enough.”

“Mm...” Emily nodded, yet still thinking. Clothes would be a good idea, right? What brands did Joyce like? Foreign ones... Expensive ones... Huh. While not a lot of money was leaving Emily accounts as of late (not for a lack of trying), her savings weren’t marvelous either. Trying to meet the expectations Emily imagined her girlfriend had suddenly left her feeling queasy.

“...Maybe I could give you a list of things to choose from?” Joyce softly extended a branch.

“No...I’ll...I’ll think of something,” Emily nodded like a self-affirmation.

“Okay,” Joyce let it be. “But speaking of writing stuff, I’m going to need a Christmas list from you soon. Thankfully my company’s mail room can do express shipping to the North Pole, so it should reach Santa on time.” And the way her reasoning flowed ever-so casually, it was enough to make a daydreamer who was none-the-wiser believe her.

Which is why Emily had a double-take.

“Wait, what?”

“A Christmas list? For Santa?” Joyce repeated. “I meant to ask you earlier, but I know we’ve been busy.”

“Uhm...you mean you need to know what I want? Yeah, I can do that...I mean—I really don’t need anything, actually.” Frankly, whatever she needed Joyce had already done for her, which was also precisely because Emily tried not to be wanting for anything.

“I have a good idea of what I wanna do for you, but no, hon, I mean we need to get your list to Santa.”

Emily finally sat upright to look at her girlfriend.

“Joyce,” Emily had a weird smile, “we don’t have to do the Santa game.”

“Game?” Joyce smiled back, but more so in the sense that she wasn’t quite following.

And Emily quickly understood she was reaching an uncrackable nut. “Fine,” she huffed, but went on to say, “but I don’t really need anything. Santa deals with *kids*, not adults.”

“Perfect!” Joyce’s face lit up. “Not what Emily wants, but what *Emmy* wants! I’m sure you could ask for all sorts of toys, clothes, special trips... I’m sure Santa’s made up his mind about a few different things, but there’s no reason why you can’t make a direct request,” Joyce reasoned, and Emily was stretching the imaginary kid cells in her brain just to follow.

“But, you’re not gonna bring them—” Emily sighed before correcting herself, “*Santa* isn’t bringing them *here*, is he...?”

“No, he’s bringing them to our house. He has you on the list as living there, I’m sure. I have to ask Santa if he’ll deliver them the next day for us.”

“Can’t he just drop them off during Christmas Eve? We’ll see them when we get back home.”

“And then we won’t get *our* Christmas morning,” Joyce frowned. “Besides, we’re gonna have to unpack, you’ll be tired from the plane ride... No, Santa can come the next day. Don’t worry, Santa Sleigh fuel is cheap, Mommy can afford it.”

“Santa fuel?” Emily scoffed with a subsequent giggle. “And how cheap is cheap?”

“However much a sack of carrots cost,” Joyce mused, and soon both women were all laughs.

And after settling down,

“Hey Joyce?”

“Yeah?”

“Love you,” Emily contently spoke as she laid back again. Joyce’s arms draped over her shoulders.

“Love you too.” Joyce rolled her head to the side, staring at the bathroom floor. And while she pondered about nothing in particular, she couldn’t help but notice something was missing. Aimlessly, she added, “I think my mom took your clothes, too...”

“Mom?” It was the next morning and the clock was ticking. Steaming food was wafting from the kitchen and guests were due to arrive at any moment.

“Hm?” Mary, with the audacity to look so innocent, turned her head from the couch. “What’s wrong?”

Under better circumstances, a talk like this would have Joyce resting her hands on her hips, yet discipline like that was reserved for Emily and being an authority figure to her own mother felt wrong. Stances and postures were supposed to command confidence and channel indomitable authority, yet the only wild card bigger than Joyce was her own mother. She felt like a park ranger trying to poke a bear with a stick.

“Last night,” Joyce said, and the silence ensued.

“...What about it?” Mary looked confused, hence Joyce’s annoyance.

Did she really have to connect the dots for her? “Mom, the bathroom. Emily.”

Then finally a reasonable reaction hit her mother. A look of horror, meaning some sense of remorse actually did exist within the woman. She shot up from her seat and hurried over, speaking in a quiet panic.

“Goodness, no– did she have an accident?” Mary’s concern was genuine, hence Joyce trying to stomach her own sense of dumbfounded shock. She was already walking ahead for the stairs. “I’m glad I went and got that sheet for your bed...”

“W-wait– Mom! No! Stop!” Joyce first stuttered, then started to command with a hand swiping at the air. “No! She did not have an accident–!” *Shit!* In a panic, Joyce whipped her head over by the kitchen. It sounded busy. Radio music was blaring, and Dad was whistling. God, thank the lord he wasn’t listening.

“She didn’t?” Mary asked, but however convincing Joyce may have been, her mother still wasn’t coming down the stairs. “Well what’s wrong then? You found the changing supplies I left you, right?”

“Yes,” Joyce hung her head, holding back an outburst, “we did. That’s not what I’m trying to talk about though. I’m trying to talk to *you* about what you did last night in the bathroom. You walked right in on Emily!”

“Walked in on...?” Mary furrowed her brow, but eventually a eureka hit her. “Oh! When I was getting you two some towels?”

“Yes!”

“Honey, I don’t think I’m following... What did I do wrong?”

And doing her best to use smart and safe strategies, Joyce quietly exhaled. “Mom, you walked in on Emily when she was naked.”

Finally, just maybe, Mary was giving a rational reaction this time; not one that could possibly have any other meaning.

“I-I did?” Mary looked like she was ready to choke.

“Yes, you did,” Joyce repeated, somehow wishing she could smile over such a trivial and questionable “victory,” such as getting the jump on her own mom.

And especially on a day to be thankful for so much, let it be known how thankful Joyce was to rediscover the once long-lost sense of remorse her mother apparently still had.

“Mom, it’s fine,” even if it really wasn’t. “Just from now on, please think about—”

“Oh! Wait! No, she wasn’t naked!” Mary dropped her fist into her palm with a smile of relief. “She was still in her diaper!”

“...Yeah?” But alas, Joyce could not be thankful for shattered dreams. “Mom...you embarrassed Emily. I’d be embarrassed. What you did was wrong. Just because you don’t mind seeing Emily like that doesn’t mean she feels the same!”

“Oh...” Mary frowned, staring off in a sense that seemed to heavily imply that she still didn’t quite get it, miraculously. “She remembers that I already know that she needs them though, right?”

She doesn't need them...! “Yes...she did not forget,” Joyce tried not to grit her teeth. “Remember what we talked about? This is meant to stay between us. This is sensitive and *I* am the one who deals with Emily when it comes to that stuff. I’m not looking for an apology,” because with how her mom thought, frankly it would be far from genuine simply because she wouldn’t understand what she’s apologizing for. After all, if kids need diapers, what’s so wrong about being cognizant of that? Having to explain though that Emily was an adult with boundaries and privacy however was something Joyce didn’t anticipate being an issue whatsoever. What or who could have ever made her mom come to that conclusion?!

People are coming soon, aren't they...? I should get Emily up from her nap...

Joyce jumped out of her head again just to revisit the issue at hand.

“You do not need to apologize. You do not need to do anything. I just want you to please think before waltzing right in the bathroom where someone might be naked, and would prefer not to be *seen* naked.”

“I...” Mary started, but she did look convincingly stumped, albeit for all the wrong reasons.

“Joyce, hon, you know that I just want to help, right?”

“I know you do, Mom,” Joyce said as she tried to wave off the sympathy attack. “But believe me, you have done more than enough, so please just focus on something else? Next time you knock, please wait for *explicit* permission to come in. And as an extra reminder,” Joyce came one step closer on the stairs, “please keep and limit these conversations between us.” *Do not involve Emily*. Not any more than she already had.

“Okay, sure,” Mary nodded suspiciously amicably, coming down the few steps she traveled.

“Joyce, you know I just want Emily to feel welcome, right?”

“Yes Mom, I do, and Emily is aware of that as well,” painfully so, “so just knowing you feel that way is enough. Let’s just focus on Thanksgiving today, okay?”

“I know, hon, I will,” Mary nodded, “but that means you two being comfortable is part of it, you know?”

“Mom...” Joyce warned. Her words were getting dangerously close to a bad place.

“Oh! And actually,” Mary, all smiles again, walked back over to the stairs. “How about I empty that diaper pail for you? You saw it, right? I really hope you got something like that for back home; I really don’t think using a normal bin is a good ide—”

“We’re fine,” Joyce answered in the straightest, calmest voice she could muster. “I will empty it myself tomorrow before we leave.”

Then her mother read between the lines that never even existed. “Oh—” she covered her mouth, “is Emily sleeping right now? Is she napping?”

Without a word, Joyce walked up to her mom, dropping her hands on her shoulders and steering her to the kitchen.

“Please go help Dad.”

And before her mother could rebuttal, Joyce made a hasty departure for her bedroom.

Inside the curtains were mostly closed, save for the strips of sun still peering through the gaps in fabric. The bed Joyce had already made once after waking up (Emily included) was now slowly starting to regress into the mess it was made into after sleeping in it for the night.

After sitting on the side of the bed, right next to where her sleeping beauty slumbered, Joyce whispered, “Hey.”

One of Emily’s hands was glued onto Pip, sitting idly by the edge and bearing the brunt of Emily’s sleep-controlled fingers squeezing a tuft of his stuffed mochi-ness.

“Emily...” Joyce coaxed her into waking again, having her by the shorts and gingerly tugging off her garments, showing more and more of her padded plastic-covered behind. “Come on, I gave you an extra hour after breakfast, and I just gave you five more minutes because I had to talk to my mean old mom...” she playfully sang in a quiet voice. “Rise and shine, munchkin!”

Without Joyce to act like her retaining wall, Emily was now keeper of the mattress, turning with a sleepy groan where she splayed out to cover the kingdom in all directions. Her baggy shorts stretched as her legs came apart, hanging somewhere around the thighs and showing off her diapered crotch and hips.

It wasn’t a lot, and likely before her nap, but the faintest lukewarm temperature Joyce could feel against her diaper tickled her heart in a way she was all-too appreciative of. She sat and watched Emily still sleeping for a minute longer, until making one last happy sigh before standing back up.

“Okay, but you had your chance...!” Joyce teased with her hands on the curtains.

Whoosh!

The hooks skidded across the rods as the room was suddenly flooded with daylight. The whimper from bed was immediate as the tiny vampire screeched at the influx of light.

“Nooo, you don’t,” Joyce drifted from the second window just to wrench the blanket Emily was trying to use to keep things dark again. “Sorry, nap time’s over.”

“Not a nap...” Emily muttered with her face halfway stuffed in a pillow.

“Then rest time is over,” Joyce argued from a different angle. “People are gonna be here soon, so I wanna get you up and ready.”

“Pants...” Emily commanded in a mumble.

“Skirt,” Joyce decided for her, holding it out already in her hands. “With some leggings, too.”

“...Change...” Even in her sleep Emily tried for something else.

“Yes,” Joyce agreed, sort of surprisingly. “Not because I think you *need* a change, but because I wanna start you out comfy.”

“How’m nh nnuh ‘ll ouu ‘ffuh nhhh...?”

With a growing smile she forced Pip out of Emily’s face.

“Big girl words this time, please?”

“...” with less confidence, Emily started turning her head. “How am I gonna tell you I need a change...?”

“You won’t,” Joyce kissed her on the head, then tore off her diaper tapes. “Don’t worry, I’ll be checking often. Discreetly,” she added as another assurance. “So, other than the food that I know you’re not looking forward to, is everything else about today exciting?” Joyce chatted while she worked with a wet wipe.

“Y-...” Emily flinched from the cold, “Yes...”

One diaper change later and Joyce dragged Emily up to a sitting position by the hands.

“Here, step in these,” Joyce offered Emily the leggings then tended to her own appearance in a nearby mirror.

Emily did so, shimmying them up her legs as best she could, though struggling once they reached her padded pelvis.

“Aren’t leggings supposed to be...” Emily grunted as she shimmied more and more, “stretchy?”

“They are...” Joyce half-answered while she fixed her own hair. “Sometimes you’ve just gotta pull a little.”

“I am though...! Just! Stretch!”

“Hang on, I’ll help in just a second,” Joyce waved her hand at her.

But Emily was wiggling and worming, shaking and stretching, fighting the material that reached its theoretical limit. But finally in one big hurrah, Emily tugged hard and magically the leggings slid into place perfectly.

“There, got it,” Emily declared with a small sense of pride.

“You did?” Joyce finally turned around and held up her hand. “High-five!”

They slapped palms and Joyce just a second later wanted to slap herself upside the head.

“Wait...oh no...”

“What?” Emily frowned. “What’s wrong? What is it?”

All her girlfriend wore was an apologetic smile, and Emily walked over to the mirror. She couldn’t see everything, but she could see the most damaging aspect of it, naturally. If Moses could part the Red Sea, then Emily could part the black leggings.

She watched in horror, tracing the invisible line down her front where leggings began and abruptly ended. Her crotch was torn along the unifying thread that held it all together.

“W-wait...! But...!” Emily whimpered at a loss, holding her hand over where the diaper generously peeked through the tear in her leggings. “But I stretched it...!”

“And it didn’t fit...” Joyce finished the thought for her, debating whether to smirk or join in the misery. “Wait, hang on, hold still for me...?” Joyce walked around her just to peek at the tag on the waistband. “...Oh, now I see the issue.”

“What? What issue?” Emily moaned as her ruined leggings were rolled down her legs.

“I brought the wrong ones. These are your big girl leggings. Not built for diapers,” Joyce held them up just to see the damage. Then without a second thought she discarded them to the side.

“Sorry...” Emily apologized, but Joyce just gave her a knowing look.

“Emily, you didn’t do anything wrong,” she chuckled, giving her a hug. “Besides, I at least know we dressed you in a pair of some that *did* fit. Which are...” Joyce turned in place, sifting through a couple drawers before sliding it shut, turning around with empty hands. “Which are...where?”

Now in just a diaper and shirt Emily was going through the wardrobe with Joyce, finding nothing but disappointment.

“Where could they have gone?” Emily was finally starting to sound worried. “I was wearing them last night...!”

“They’re somewhere, it’s okay,” Joyce tried to hush her as the calming voice of reason, but even she was stumped. Where *did* they go...?

And a sharp, metal noise echoed and muffled through the floorboards. A distant chime carried throughout the house that spiked Emily upright, bringing her knees as close together as her diaper would allow. It was the harbinger’s call. The beginning of the end. Danger on the horizon. A cold sweat was already starting on her back as doom itself had just arrived.

“Oh, I guess people are here already,” Joyce shrugged, then went back to searching.

“What if we can’t find them...?” Emily followed Joyce around the room like a lost kitten, wanting at times to just tug on her sleeve and cling.

“We have options, don’t worry,” Joyce chuckled. “Let’s just try and search a little more, okay?”

“Can’t I just wear panties?” Emily was finally pleading. The fact that something had gone wrong was already petrifying. It was a sign for them to stop and stick to safer pastures. Places that didn’t involve protection.

“With how much my mom has done already...I really don’t know if that’s the best idea,” Joyce admitted, and the obvious displeasure on Emily’s face brought her in for a hug. “Hey...! It’s okay!” Joyce brought them over to the bed and they sat side by side. “What’s going on. Talk to me. Feeling nervous?”

It was a small, quiet gesture, but Emily did nod.

“If...if your mom already found out, what happens if anyone else does...?” Was it not a fair concern? Snooping ran in the family, didn’t it? Being overbearing? Emily was fresh and new. She was bait meant to entice all the predators hungry for knowledge and dirt on other people, then clinging on to it like benign tumors that couldn’t be removed. Granted, Mary was sometimes borderline hostile with it. The worst part though was that she didn’t even realize it herself.

“You will be absolutely fine. Ab-so-lute-ly-fine,” she announced with each soft poke on her girlfriend’s chest. Everyone’s gonna love you. Although, not quite nearly as much as *I* love you, however,” Joyce confessed with a prideful grin. “So don’t let this get in the way,” Joyce soothed Emily as she played with the creases along the hips of her diaper. “This,” Joyce gave the front a dry, but loving squeeze, “is what is meant to keep you secure today. Let’s put it like this: you being in diapers today is actually a really good thing, you know?”

Cue Emily’s skepticism.

Cue Joyce’s further explanation.

“If my mom for any reason whatsoever felt the need to snoop, which she will not,” said Joyce, with a questionable track record against her mom, “it’d make a whole lot more sense for you to be in protection than anything else.”

“B-but– doesn’t she think I don’t need them *all* the time?” Emily huffed. Keeping up appearances when she didn’t fully want to was tiring indeed.

“Yes, not all the time, but specifically in calmer, more laid back situations,” Joyce recounted their web of lies as best as she could. “Today’s just one of those new and exciting sort of things... A lot really is gonna be going on. I know you’re nervous, and I think my mom is expecting that too. So really, I mean it when I say that I want you leaning on me today.”

“What...what if I changed myself today?” Emily suggested. “Like maybe I could tell you then go–”

“Emily,” Joyce was looking as kind and sincere as she always did with her, but the words didn’t match her expression. “No. Nothing changes that rule. You don’t change your own diapers.”

“But I’d tell you...!” Emily tried not to complain, but keeping herself in check wasn’t easy in such dire circumstances. “What if people see us leave together? What happens when they start asking?”

“Then we make up an excuse,” Joyce didn’t skip a beat. “Whether it’s laundry, I have to respond to an email, take a call, take care of packing; whatever I have to say, I’ll say it. Besides, I’ll want to check in on how you’re doing, you know? These are the chances I get to hear how you’re really doing. This way I see how both you and your diaper is holding up,” she smirked trying to get the humor going, and even Emily struggled not to smile.

“...Fine,” Emily sighed, and Joyce rubbed her shoulder. “What are we doing about my clothes, though?”

Joyce pursed her lips, and Emily’s foundation was creaking. She was seeing a hard-knocks kind of look. “...Well, I do have something...”

“Something...?” Emily nervously repeated, and she watched Joyce head over to the dresser. She opened the drawer, then proceeded to lift out a small stack of clothes.

Joyce quietly thumbed through the bundles, until finally landing on something specific. “I wasn’t exactly intending it for this, but...”

And Emily’s unease melted into an even more disappointed frown.

“No. No way.”

“So is Joyce upstairs?” a new voice Emily hadn’t heard before was coming from the kitchen.

“She should be down any second now. Emily too!” Mary said enthusiastically. “I can’t wait for you two to meet her! She’s the sweetest! I think they’re both still adjusting from the jetlag, though.”

“We picked them up at the airport just the other day,” Frank added, “but your sister definitely wasn’t expecting us.”

“Sorry about that,” Joyce came into the kitchen with Emily by her side just one step behind.

“Hey, long time no see!” a man as tall as Frank descended on Joyce with wide and open arms. They pulled each other into a hug as they both laughed.

“Good to see you too!” Joyce squeezed back one last time before letting each other go. “Ah—Emily, this is John, my younger brother. John, this is Emily!”

“I hope you don’t mind a hug, do you?” John held out his arms, and Emily stammered for a second.

She was still digesting the reality of being Little Red Riding Hood lost in a forest of walking and talking redwoods at the moment.

“Or...handshake?” John, recovering from an awkwardness Emily didn’t intend, shifted to an open palm, which Emily did quietly receive.

I don’t mind a hug, though...

“S-sorry, nice to meet you!” Emily put a smile back on. “Joyce told me a lot about you!” Emily said, who also had very little inkling of anything about Joyce’s brother, admittedly. *Why did I even say that?*

“Yeah?” John shifted his eyes to his sister. “Good stuff?”

Joyce shrugged playfully, “I can only speak the truth.”

“So stuff then,” John nodded affirmatively at Emily.

“Where’s Hannah?” Joyce briefly looked around. “Is she coming later?”

“No, she’s outside right now just wrapping up a call. Don’t know how you two do work in medical,” John shook his head.

“I think our angles are a bit different, but she really does sound busy. Is it gonna be an issue during the wedding? Congratulations, by the way.”

“Yeah—!” Emily blurted like a poor echo to her significant other. The kind smile John gave her, Mary and Frank included made her face want to become the red hood itself. “Sorry, I mean congratulations as well...”

“Did Joyce only just tell you?” John asked her with a chuckling smile. “Or did Mom only just tell *you*?” he targeted Joyce.

“I told Joyce as soon as you told me!” Mary huffed, now of course when her own reputation was on the line.

“Everyone knew in plenty of time~” Joyce gently pushed her brother onward. “Was anyone else outside, or are you guys the first?”

“Second, if we’re counting you,” John challenged, and after sitting her brother down Joyce walked away after tussling his short head of hair. But just as he got into his seat he was getting right back out of it. “Oh wow, all that stuff smells really good. Oh– don’t mind if I do!”

Emily stood in place off to the side, but she noticed John make a beeline for a wooden board on the counter between aluminum trays wrapped and covered over heating trays. Only then could she make out the mountain of assorted cheeses and meats. Bowls of olives and cherry tomatoes. Beds of crackers and pockets of jams just to accent all the mouth-watering flavor.

Then she heard the front door open and close.

“Sorry! Sorry!” a woman’s hurried voice came closer and closer from down the hall, until finally emerging in the kitchen.

“Hey! You made it!” Frank cheered before his wife gave him a scolding look, then came right over to the woman for a hug.

“Was it an important call?” Mary asked after the two had each other by the elbows.

“A little, but taken care of,” the woman nodded assuringly. Dressed in jeans, a ruffled shirt and textured jacket, she looked ready to run for work at a moment’s notice, yet still open to some casual relaxation. “Did I miss something?” she leaned right over Mary’s shoulder, and had a cheery smile to go with the incidental eye contact she was suddenly making with Emily.

“Nohpe,” John mumbled with a mouthful of cracker and cheese. “Goht a heahdstart, tho.”

Mary pursed her lips while the woman put on a disappointed smile.

“We’re working on it,” she professed, and Mary laughed. Finally they let go of each other and going past Mary she went straight for Joyce.

Collectively they sang, “Heyy!” before giving each other a hug.

“Was the flight good?” she asked Joyce.

“No issues. Just a little jet lag, and surprise pick-ups from my parents,” Joyce not so casually side-eyed her mom. “More importantly though, congratulations on the wedding!”

“Thank you!” she was practically beaming. “We don’t have a specific date yet, but I hope you can make it when we do decide for sometime next year...?”

“Of course!” Joyce nodded with certainty. “Except,” and there was a glimmer in her eye. “I hope I can bring a plus-one?”

“So *that’s* who this is!” The woman’s vigor was lit anew and her shadow loomed over Emily’s shy, but welcoming smile. “You are...Emily! Right? I’m Hannah, John’s fiance!”

“Nice to meet you!” Emily greeted right back.

“Handshakes only!” John teased at Hannah, though by association Emily’s guilt started flaring up the moment her confused expression crossed her soon-to-be husband’s.

So before anything could be clarified, Emily was already being embraced into a brief hug. And only after letting go, Hannah asked, almost apologetically,

“Wait, that was just a joke, right? Is it okay to hug you?”

“Y-yeah, it’s fine,” Emily laughed awkwardly. How was she supposed to casually explain that she didn’t hug Joyce’s brother because she was just too shy to accept outright?

“It’s fine,” Joyce added on top of Emily’s half-baked stability. “Like I was saying before, we’re just dealing with a little bit of jet lag, still, is all!”

N-nice cover, Joyce!

“Ohh! No, of course!” Hannah waved her hand dismissively. “Seriously, don’t worry about it. But Emily, I love your outfit, by the way!”

“Oh? Thank you,” Emily accepted graciously, but cringed internally. She didn’t want compliments for this. Not under these circumstances. Now she knew two people loved how she

looked, and Emily certainly wasn't one of them. Joyce, meanwhile, was probably underway on another lap of swooning.

Navy blue skirt with flowers over a tucked-in yellow, white-collared shirt and a loose indoor jacket to go with it. It did look nice. Charming. Cute? Adorable? Hopefully not the last two, but Joyce was starting to become biased as of late.

The real matter of concern though were her bare legs being on show. Specifically the reason for it. It wasn't quite right to say that her yellow shirt was tucked in. After all, there wasn't an available end *to* tuck in. Had maybe someone casually flipped the fidgety girl's skirt, they might see that the yellow shirt traveled down her torso, pelvis, and surprisingly, even between her legs. Back around and up her bottom, along her back and to her shoulders where the front started all over again. Held together by an array of snaps arching over the bulge of her presently dry diaper. The jacket as well was meant to hide the two snaps along her shoulder as well.

And now here she was, being complimented by Joyce's family for her choice of outfit. If only she knew.

If only she knew that she just complimented another grown woman's onesie.

"Is that how you two met?" Hannah laughed at Joyce, "similar fashion sense?"

"Funnier coincidence than that," Joyce danced her hand around Emily's shoulder before being right at her side. Joyce apologetically smiled at Hannah. "I hope Emily doesn't take any spotlight off the wedding conversation today...!"

"Wait, no, I—" Emily tried to refute, but Hannah immediately laughed right back.

"No, *no!* Please let it happen!" she giggled some more. "Saying we're getting married doesn't mean we have a wedding planned yet. I feel like today's only gonna be questions about that...!" she playfully groaned. But on a dime she gasped and whipped her head around. "Oh! I almost forgot about Frank!" she laughed as the man playfully rolled his eyes and they embraced in a rocking hug.

"Smells as good as always!" Hannah beamed. "Did you use that one spice in the stuffing again? The one you tried last year?"

"That I did," Frank nodded confidently.

“Looking forward to it!” Hannah strode over to the counter where the platter was and grabbed a plate. “Oh wow, it all looks so good!”

A small nudge on her shoulder made Emily look up at Joyce.

“Let’s get some too before it’s all gone,” Joyce encouraged, and they went over too. After enough food was grabbed and drinks were served, the two siblings and their partners were all sitting down.

And as they sat, apparently only now did Emily notice a slight issue with her current attire. She had the chance to be mindful of it a thousand different times before. Maybe when she ate dinner at home with Joyce. Maybe when she sat in her high chair. Maybe when she ate dinner last night with Frank and Mary. But nope. Of course, only now.

There was an awful amount of “freedom” between her legs, mandated by the disposable diaper around her hips. She couldn’t comfortably touch her knees and privacy purely came from the slack in her skirt and yellow cover of her onesie. Not that anyone was caring to look under the table, thank goodness...

“Everything been good with you?” John chatted with Joyce, who nodded with a hand over her mouthful of food.

“It’s been good,” and Emily almost jumped out of her seat when someone sitting right next to her brushed her thigh with their finger. Sneakily so... “Very good, actually.”

And Hannah let out an excited laugh of her own. “I bet! I heard Frank and Mary went to visit you two? Let me guess:” and she looked straight at Emily. “Their mom was *all* over you!”

Collectively, Joyce and John let out a laugh, Mary, thought to be busy chatting with her husband, suspiciously looked over, and Emily with an awkward smirk felt like a deer caught in headlights.

“Uhm...well, she was excited since we were just meeting and...”

Her dead-fish response was cut short by Hannah herself. “Oh my gosh, seriously, don’t even worry about it. When I was meeting John’s parents for the first time it went the exact same way.”

The *exact* same? Emily’s gullible side sighed in relief.

Thank goodness! So clearly she must be wearing diapers, too!

“Oh– and also, Emily,” Hannah threw a finger at her, “I’m a little curious; what perfume or spray are you using? I love that smell!”

“H-huh?” Emily stuttered.

“Hon, it’s bad manners sniffing my sister’s girlfriend,” John not so quietly scolded, and she playfully shoved him by the shoulder.

“Oh shut up!” she laughed. “But no, seriously! It smells like...like...”

“Lavender?” Joyce suggested, and Emily’s toes were curling.

“Yeah! Lavender! So wait– is it something you gave her? I kinda wanna try some!” Hannah was eager, Joyce was kind, and on the inside, Emily was cringing.

My powdered ass did not just get complimented... I didn't just get an indirect comment about my diapers...!

“I can send you some when we get back home,” Joyce offered. An invisible thread was tugging Emily’s expression towards Joyce.

Y-you didn't actually just promise her that, did you?

“Thank you so much!” Hannah beamed.

Before Emily could say or do anything to fall off the sudden tightrope she was walking, she went back to some more cracker and cheese on her plate. This time with an olive.

“So how long have you two been together now?” John asked. “Feel like it’s been a bit since we last heard about it from Mom.”

“I can’t help but find it a little funny I didn’t get to break the news myself,” Joyce spoke a bit loudly, coincidentally noticing how her mother was also looking conveniently busy speaking with their dad. “But I guess it has been a little while now...” she looked over at Emily, who also seemed to be crunching the numbers. “We celebrated Emily’s birthday in May, so...”

“Five...six months?” Emily guessed.

“W–...” Joyce frowned for a second. “That long?”

“Uh-oh,” John smirked. “The honeymoon phase is supposed to feel like the longest, you know?”

Five months... Joyce was quiet, but her expression was still peachy. Internally, quietly, she was floored. That long with Emily, and to think of how far they came. Where they were right now. Five months ago, thinking she'd be sitting next to her lover on Thanksgiving, keeping her in a diaper no less...

Just so others could have a chance, Joyce made a small note to leave the wishbone alone tonight.

“So do you handle all the cooking at your place?” John asked Joyce, and embarrassment by association hit Emily right beside her.

“Most of the time, yeah, but Emily's made a few things before,” Joyce explained, and in the process of “defending” Emily's honor, really only coddled it like a child that needed spoiling.

A few things... It was hard to even round it up to that much.

“Tried and failed...” Emily murmured on a self-defeating note, but the air must have been off, courtesy of Emily's powdered bum, because the opposite couple took it as humor.

“Nono,” Hannah waved her hand. “That's good. Play to your strengths! Unfortunately John didn't quite pick up the cooking bug from Frank.”

“That he did not!” Frank added from the other end.

“I can work a microwave and stove, thank you very much!” John defended himself just as loudly, finally making Emily crack a goofy smile.

“I help Joyce sometimes, so...I guess I contribute a little.”

“Mm,” Joyce nodded while she chewed. Brandishing Emily like a jewel on display. “She's a huge help in the kitchen. Send my brother over sometime; I can train him into your sous chef.”

Huge help... AKA, filling pots with water and occasionally chopping a vegetable.

“With all due respect, I can work an oven and microwave quite fine, thank you very much,” John added with the best snobby attitude he could muster.

“Yes, because my fiance can engineer us a working security system, but not a halfway decent dinner,” Hannah teased.

“Start teasing me again once we lose power in a storm,” John teased right back, then stood up from his chair with an empty plate. “Dad, the charcuterie board was a really good idea this year! What made you want to change things up?”

“Nope, not my idea,” Frank threw his thumb over at Joyce, “thank your sister.”

“I can *never* get enough of these,” Hannah said before biting into another mini-sandwich. “You and Frank make every family get-together worth it...! Ah—” Hannah laughed sheepishly, grabbing Mary by the arm as she quietly walked by. “Your decorations too, Mary!”

Mary had a straight face, but it quickly crumbled. “Don’t worry, I feel the same way!”

Apparently Emily ushered in an era of sweeping change. She happily snacked, barely noticing when Joyce would drop another piece of something or other on her plate, like a never-ending personal platter of finger foods. She did not question, she consumed. And as another mental note, seeing as she was lucky enough to be offered the one thing she would assuredly like today, she had to make the most of it. Thank goodness for happy coincidences.

...

Coincidence?

“Waigh—” Emily awkwardly slammed her mouth shut. Speaking with her mouth full didn’t exactly put out a good impression for Joyce’s family... After a long and arduous swallow, she asked again, “Wait, the board was your idea?”

“Uh-huh,” Joyce nodded with an innocent smile. “I thought we could try something a little different this time.”

The couple was intertwined in a sweet affection for one another. As far as the script goes, at least. Rather, it was a battle of the brains as their telepathic thoughts waged war.

From Emily, *Didn’t I say I didn’t want you making anything special for me?!*

From Joyce, *And I decided that I wanted you to eat something today that you’re happy with.*

There was a dramatic drop in Emily’s pace with her snacking, now knowing it was all “tainted” meats and cheeses.

“Let me go get some water,” Joyce announced as she stood from her seat, leaving Emily alone at the table with John and Hannah.

“So Emily, how’d you two meet?” Hannah asked.

“Yeah, knowing how busy my sister is, I’m guessing it was at a work event, or something?” John added, and Emily’s self-esteem wilted a tiny bit.

Maybe if I was one of the caterers...

“Just uhm...on the street, actually. Th-the sidewalk, I mean,” Emily timidly said. “Joyce ended up inviting me over...so we kind of just went from there.” Sparing some of the details that put Emily on the street, sleeping over, living like a freeloader, and so on.

“So you two just really hit it off then?” Hannah asked with an earnest smile.

“Swapping stories without me?” Joyce was back with two glasses. “What,” she looked at Emily, “of how we met?”

“Yeah,” Emily nodded. Hopefully she didn’t deviate enough to make their stories sound any different.

And while Joyce chatted and filled in the vague blanks, Emily quietly nursed her glass, touching her knees as a slow stream trickled out of her.

Don’t think about it... Nobody can tell... Maybe Joyce could, but that was beside the point.

The warmth crept, her diaper did its job, and suddenly Emily felt like she could breathe again.

“So Emily, do you do work similar to Joyce?” Jack was the next to ask, and Emily was yet again wishing she didn’t have to answer.

For half a second she expected Joyce to bail her out, but seeing her own partner patiently staring at her told a different story. It wasn’t that she was throwing Emily to the wolves, but giving her the opportunity to set her own terms. How much she wanted to share about herself.

“Not uhm...exactly. I actually work in— or...I *did* work in real estate,” Emily explained, starting to sound sheepish. “Right now I’m looking for something else.”

“Awh, I’m sorry,” Hannah replied a bit glumly. “I’m sorry for asking about that. I’m wishing you the best of luck on your search!”

“Yeah, believe me, I understand what it’s like to go through job hunting,” John assured. “You’re not alone, and trust me, just keep applying; it’ll work out.”

“Thanks, I really appreciate it,” Emily smiled, but she took another sip from her glass to try and wash the guilt out of her mouth for the awkwardness she just caused.

“Wait, that’s it?” Joyce interrupted the mood with an expectant look at Emily.

“...Huh?” Emily quietly asked.

“You’re not gonna tell them the other good news? Don’t end it on a sad note like that.”

“Good news?” Emily sounded clueless. What, that her girlfriend could support her indefinitely, whether she stayed a couch potato or not?

“You’re not *not* working right now, aren’t you?” Joyce briefly told the other couple, “She *is* working right now.”

“I am?”

“Yes, you are!” Joyce laughed, but she was the only person with a clue. “Come on, tell them!”

What other work? What was she doing? Keeping a steady reduction on the apartment’s diaper stock? Stress-testing the building’s water pipes with all her bath times?

But a faint spark did come to mind.

“O-oh, uhm, well, I guess I’m helping Joyce do some chores around the house, but that’s—”

“Now you’re just being silly,” Joyce admonished, and Emily was genuinely stunned.

“Well clearly you know better than me, so tell them *and* me what I’ve been doing...!” Emily tucked her cheek and frowned.

“I have a seamstress who manages all my outfits,” and Emily’s as of late, “and Emily started doing some work under her.”

“No way, really?” Hannah perked up, and John curiously raised his eyebrows.

“Should I keep going?” Joyce offered Emily to take the reins, but she politely declined, hence why Joyce kept going. “She’s helping our seamstress with fittings, material logistics, documentation and orders, and just about any other small or miscellaneous thing she might need.”

“Wow, Em, sounds like you’ve got something pretty good going right now,” John laughed, and Emily awkwardly laughed too.

Meanwhile, Emily was really trying to figure out how organizing drawers, playing with Amy’s cat, and taking naps amounted to “material logistics.” God, the way Joyce could make stuff sound so important and professional was truly mesmerizing... Such a glorified way of saying she dropped Emily off at Auntie Amy’s to play for the day.

The doorbell took their attention when everyone in the kitchen turned their heads.

“Anybody’s guess who it is,” Frank shrugged. “Hon, would you mind? John,” he called for his son. “Last thing we didn’t get to was bringing up the other table. Think you could help me with that?”

“Sure,” John stood after licking his fingers, then followed Frank to presumably the basement.

“Aunts, uncles, cousins, it could be anyone,” Joyce said to Emily.

But a sudden bark outside made Emily turn her head twice.

“Nevermind. Cousin.”

Mary was already out of sight and answering the door. A chorus of greetings were exchanged and an army of spriting feet were coming down the hall. Bickering kids were what some of the voices sounded like, precisely because they were.

“I wanna play with it...!” The slightly shorter blonde boy whined at his sibling, just a handful of inches taller with his hands tightly wrapped around an iPad. “Mom said it was my turn!”

“Just give me a second!” the other boy groaned back, and the pair traveled all around the kitchen as one tried to run from the other.

“But she said so...!” the tinier one cried.

“Stop being such a baby! I need to finish this part!” the older one complained.

Their whining and fighting was incessant, loud, and inconsiderate, of course, to everyone else in the room. Hannah quietly watched, as did Joyce and Emily, who amongst the adults, quietly rolled her eyes.

“Younger one is Luke, older is Oliver,” Joyce quietly informed Emily. “Their mom is my cousin from my mom’s side, Trisha.”

“BOYS!” A loud voice from down the hall made them freeze. “Learn to share or the iPad goes away for the rest of the day!” And reluctantly, Oliver proceeded to let the iPad be yanked from his clutches by the younger sibling.

“Heyy guys~” Hannah called expectantly over at the two young boys, waving her hand. “Don’t suppose you two munchkins aren’t too busy to say hi to your auntie Hannah and Joyce, are you?”

“Hiii,” they both said back in half-assed unison, and Emily also couldn’t help but notice the quiet stares they both gave her. In fairness, however, she was a completely new face.

“Who’s that?” Luke, skipping to the meat of the matter, pointed a finger at Emily.

“Pointing isn’t nice,” Joyce pointed out, and the kid’s hand and arm went limp by his side. “This is Emily, and she’s my girlfriend. Emily,” Joyce turned her head, giving her a look that seemed to scream, *Please just bear with me*, “this is Luke and Oliver.”

“Hey guys,” Emily smiled and waved. They didn’t really say anything back.

“Okay, you’re free now,” Hannah beckoned. “Go play.”

And that they did.

“Sometimes I forget how shy they were around me the first time,” Hannah told Emily. “Don’t worry, they’ll think of you like family soon enough.”

“Sometimes I wish they’d be shy just so they don’t scream as much...” Joyce groaned quietly, and sheepishly Hannah laughed too.

“More cheese?” Joyce was asking as Emily was standing. Affectionately, she had her by the wrist. “Want me to get it?”

“No, that’s okay, I’m good,” Emily smiled, then started her trek over to the counter. Call it a trek because of the warm diaper between her legs. While she walked fine, her mind sure didn’t think so. What if she waddled? What if she crinkled? What if Hannah could tell?

“Oh, Hannah, so about the wedding...”

Nice, Joyce! Good distraction! Girlfriend and girlfriend were in sync and Joyce was offering the perfect cover. They really could read each other’s minds...!

When in reality, Joyce was just curious about the wedding.

“Hey!” in the other room, either Luke or Oliver had just shouted at the other. More bickering.

The front door down the hall opened again and something came barreling through, scraping its nail across the floor as it scurried and hurried.

“Here comes Warden,” Joyce amusedly announced. Before Emily could connect the dots, the solution revealed itself.

Trouble always seems to find its way into Joyce and Emily’s lives, particularly in the worst moments. Although, that’s likely why it’s considered trouble in the first place. Warden, a black-furred dog came rushing in, moving with such speed and purpose as if what he was about to do was a premeditated crime.

“Give it *BACK!*” Luke came into the kitchen crying for his brother right at the same time, zipping between the table and counter, right where Warden was scampering, right where Emily was standing. Joyce watched it all unfold like her head was on a swivel, and only when Emily entered the frame did her own panic ensue and she tried to intervene.

But she simply started far too late.

Warden, the friendly big dog, hopped up on his hind legs just to put all his weight on Emily with a wagging tail and excited face. She gasped but smiled, just starting to rub his fur as she arched back to handle his entire mass. That’s when Oliver, suddenly holding the iPad again simultaneously spun around to dodge his incoming little brother and sprinted backwards. In doing so, a careless foot kicked Emily’s heel and knocked her leg out of place. She gasped as she fell, hitting the floor with an astonishing thud that left her sore on the floor and Warden over her, licking her face.

It was too chaotic for her to notice half her skirt riding up underneath the dog's paw. Right where Joyce could see a cute, rounded bulge between her legs, cutely hiding behind her yellow onesie. In that split-second of horror, Joyce could even count all the snaps.

Shit.