

10 - Loose End and New Beginnings

“Joyce, I’ll be back!” Emily called from the other side of the Apartment, who was busy slipping her shoes on. She already had her jacket on and a duffel bag set beside her.

“Back?” Joyce curiously called in return. It was hard to hear Emily over the paper shredder. These pesky receipts were starting to stack up and they accumulated evidence. “Hang on, wait there for me!” She checked the clock and could see it was nearly 7:30 at night. Where could she be going at this time? Emily was an adult (at least out of their playtime) and shouldn’t have the right to be questioned as to where she went, but it certainly wasn’t like her usual routine.

Folding her glasses and setting them on the desk, her bare feet traversed the wooden floors, her steps becoming more and more audible to Emily, and soon making the distance between them nonexistent. Just as it was described, Emily was already kicking her feet into the Converse Joyce had bought her, fitting them for a snug fit, and had the large bag slung over her shoulder.

“Where’re you going?” Joyce poked out of curiosity. As weird as it felt, she found it odd to imagine Emily leaving the house unless she was with her. Not because Emily couldn’t be trusted, but it was only when they were both leaving the house or for work that it came off as ordinary...

“I think it’s high time I finally go and get the rest of my clothes? Is it okay if I bring some of my stuff back here?” Emily sounded to be fishing for assurance. Everything Joyce had provided her with was plentiful and beautiful, but there was still a piece of herself stranded in what was starting to feel like an old chapter to a book in the midst of pleasant foreshadowing. She’d reached a much more notable highlight in her life and was ready to give it her full attention. It was Jack’s place the covers were ready to close on. She’d put it off for long enough, and she did want her clothes and other few possessions back.

It was perfectly alright, but it didn’t do much to affect the initial shock value. “O-of course!” Joyce still slightly stammered. “You can just keep them in your room with the rest of your stuff. There’s no issue.” She had hoped Emily was beginning to feel comfortable enough around here, even though her usual catnaps were enough to suggest that.

“Are you...sure?” Emily asked with uncertainty. It was one thing for Joyce to buy her things with her money; making them her purchases and her items. With that in mind, it felt oddly strange to bring in an outside piece of her life into another person’s home. Admittedly, it felt invasive; despite the chemistry they already had.

“Emily,” Joyce started with a sorrowful smile. “You should know better than to be so hung up on things like that.” While it was never explicitly discussed, apparently Joyce had been the only one jumping to conclusions and getting ahead of themselves. “I was hoping you were starting to think of this as your home...” her voice grew a little quiet at the end. “But!” She quickly interjected herself. “If you do ever decide to leave, that’s understandable as well...” The second line openly came off as a tad bit more melancholic than the first. To even openly suggest the possibility was a painful reminder of how the outcome could jeopardize her calculated and deep-seeded plan, but more importantly the bond they’d formed together and the future they could have. Thoughts like that were scary to Joyce. Her heart pleaded to her brain to stop thinking such things.

“Well...” Emily shyly turned part of her face away; a bit embarrassed to be bombarded with such heavy and emotionally-invested topics. “I haven’t really planned to...leave...” Emily found herself choosing her words carefully, in a way that expressed her intent without coming off as a homeless freeloader. “And I...” the longer she spoke the harder it was to lift the words and propel them from her mouth. “Kind of like being with you, here...But I think I should start paying rent!” Emily quickly tried to assert her moral compass and justify some fair reason to make living here acceptable. “It’s only fair since you already do so-”

A pair of sweatered arms wrapped around Emily and the soft, brown hair of a familiar face pressed against her cheek.

“Then there’s no problem!” Joyce beamed. “You can live here for as long as you’d like Emily,” She glowed, pulling herself back just a bit so they could be face to face. “But your money belongs to you,” She looked a bit more serious. “How you choose to spend it is entirely up to you, but I won’t accept it.” Joyce had put her foot down.

“But that’s not fair to you, Joyce. I’m an adult. I work, and I should at least pay something for living here-”

“And you already do.” Joyce interrupted. “Maybe you were just in need of some shelter the first few days I found you, but I think we’re a bit more than just strangers at this point?” Joyce couldn’t help but smile knowing even herself that it could have very well been the understatement of the year. After everything they’d been through together, it was impossible to think of Emily as just another face. She’d become something essential, as in turn the same was for Emily in her heart, despite trying to be an adult in defiance to it.

Emily’s face read like a book when she grew red from hearing those words, already having flashbacks of the person she wanted as a landlord; a person who bathed her naked and diapered

her on multiple occasions. Not to mention she watched her go both number one and two...With that kind of rationale, even she was starting to feel foolish for suggesting such adult things; in the face of a person who cared for her in her most vulnerable state.

“And, I’ll have you know you *do* in fact have rent!” Joyce retorted, spinning the girl who was moments from heading out and planting themselves back on the floor with the smaller one’s waist locked in arms. In an exaggerated motion Joyce rubbed their cheeks together as she made playful noises. “You pay me in snuggles and cuddles each and every day!” Joyce cooed. “And it looks like rent’s due again!” She squeezed Emily and hoped to never let her go. Beyond being the key that unlocked the hole in her heart she always wanted to fill and reciprocate with, having another soul in the expansive apartment was something nice in itself.

Emily called herself an adult, which was true. But now she was only an adult *some* of the time, meaning the rest was dedicated to the babyhood she indulged in with Joyce. That in itself was more than enough, and the idea of money even being remotely involved sullied the innocence and purity of what they had. Besides, how could a mother expect to charge her own baby?

Emily couldn’t help but laugh from Joyce’s touchy manner, and kept her happy remarks quiet. For Joyce to take in and pay for another resident, it was a mere drop in the bucket as far as her salary went. And despite the unspoken flow of things, telling Emily she had a place here, it never felt right to act on it. Had it not been for Joyce’s encouraging attitude to even want something like this, as opposed to an indifferent attitude, Emily would have never considered letting a setup as one-sided as this go on. She’d have to set aside her own hardwired selflessness and allow Joyce to draw out and splay the selfish feelings within her. Although it was traditionally wrong to be selfish and spoiled like this...it was something Joyce reveled in being able to make possible in another person, because it meant the opportunity to do for someone else. By becoming the thing a respectable adult would tell her to stray from, it was the best possible way she could show her gratitude to Joyce.

“Okay, okay! I’ll stop talking about it,” Emily giggled. “Can you let me get going now? I don’t want to be back too late.” Friday would finally be upon them the next morning. Saturdays and Sundays were free days. Although, they’d transitioned from simple lazy days since being with Joyce, assuming a much more special nature. Intimate...and infantile.

“Alright,” Joyce conceded as if it were against her better judgment. “Just give me a second to get my shoes on.”

“Huh?”

“Really?” Joyce looked at her as if the confusion were hers. “Did you think I was going to make you walk around the city in the middle of a windy night, when there’s two cars between me and Charles?”

Emily found herself being offered a helping hand she was too polite to initially ask for. It was the reservedness in her that Joyce was trying to discourage, hoping for Emily to lean on her a bit more. But it was clear they still had work to do, since if she hadn’t stopped her paper shredding to come see Emily, she’d have been gone an awful while.

“Unless you want to walk all night with your stuff?” Joyce waited for a response with a smirk. She didn’t need an answer, because they were both thinking the same thing.

“Well...if you don’t mind...” Her face looked troubled again.

“Give me just a minute.” Joyce was already slipping her socks on.

From inside the car and in the passenger seat, apart from the quiet hum coming from the car’s engine and the surrounding vehicles, the ride was silent from other than idle chatter. Emily and Joyce sat in the front, with the more motherly of the two’s hands behind the wheel. Emily had given her the address, still recent from a year-long memory of being there. Each block they passed and the closer they got, what she was doing felt that much more surreal.

Jack was probably home, he never worked this late, and he usually went out on just the weekends...*Why?* Why did she have to remember these things? Just thinking about how they left off, how he left her high and dry...! It made her seethe with anger...confusion...and sadness. Hopefully she could be in and out as fast as possible, so she could pack away this painful box of memories and never see them again. The only thing she could hope for now is if he made good on his promise.

A hand was suddenly squeezing her knee, connected to an arm that led to the body of Joyce.

“...Thanks.” Joyce always seemed to be reading her mind, even when she least expected it.

“Just look forward to tomorrow,” Joyce’s words had excitement infused in them. “If you’re not too tired we can have our playtime a little sooner than planned for.” From only one weekend session, Joyce was already itching for more. Babying Emily and simply enjoying the idea of motherhood was like candy to her sweet tooth, and you simply couldn’t stop at one. But her

urges always came second to Emily's own pace. Ultimately she ran the show and would decide how things go, but within that scope Joyce would be sure to lead her little girl along...

"O...okay..." Emily looked away and out the window, still trying to swallow her pride from wanting such things and forgetting her troubling thoughts. She in herself was becoming hooked, even if a sense of guilt was weighing her for wanting to be babied by Joyce too...But she also knew from how they first discussed the terms, Joyce was looking for something far more intense in not necessarily the physical but emotional sense. A brief example was what she did in her diapers...

Her diapers.

The thought of them belonging to her drummed up such squeamish feelings. All it'd take for Joyce to change her was a single wetting. Deep down, she knew Joyce was reserving herself and would never trample over Emily's cautious ease into the process, but it must have been difficult for Joyce in her own way. She wanted something that Emily was taking a long time to give. It was frustrating trying to provide as Joyce's baby girl when she herself was still trying to adjust to it. There were things that had been considered unspeakable before, like peeing in a diaper and being stark naked, yet they were oddly digestible now...The phenomena from her interactions with Joyce made the incomprehensible somehow commonplace, which now was as bewildering as it was strangely alluring.

These endless pits of thought and self-reflection were always the worst when she couldn't keep herself from continuously falling, but it was those simple gestures Joyce would always make that woke her up from her dream and returned her to simplicity. It almost made her *want* Joyce to read her own mind...so she could lay herself bare and let the ever-so knowledgeable and kind woman sort the pieces out for her.

"Alright my little thinker, we're here." Joyce spoke as the car pulled off the road and into a small lot, followed by the car easing into a halt. Out the windshield Emily could see the same brick building she'd shuffled out of over a week ago. It reminded her of how she had been a much more disheveled and distraught person, who even put themselves in pain...To think a puddle on the sidewalk could have blessed her with Joyce...The world certainly worked in mysterious ways. But her thoughts came full circle being back here, being introduced to a familiar sight. What was something she walked away from was now something she returned to; hopefully for the last time.

Jack.

“Should I wait out here?” Joyce asked, hoping to respect Emily’s boundaries. While this was a part of Emily’s life she wasn’t well-versed in, she knew the gist of how this had been a long-term partner. She wouldn’t want to inappropriately include herself unless Emily had requested her help.

“I’m not sure how much stuff I have, actually...” Her words tried to shroud her obvious intent. “It might be a while, so you could get bored here.” Emily awkwardly wrestled her thumbs.

As cute as it was and Joyce knew what she was getting at, a much more clear response would be needed for something like this. Maybe she could be like that when as a baby, but Emily to some degree could not be careless with a moment like this.

“Emily,” Joyce caught her full and undivided attention. “I need either a yes or no, please. Be honest with me.”

The internal struggle didn’t last long, not when the gravity of going back to Jack’s by herself was sinking in. The flare and fire within her seemed to dampen just from trying to imagine confrontation. Maybe it was the rain from day one that was making her so gloomy right now. Regardless of the poetic thoughts, she wanted Joyce.

“P...please come with me...” her quiet voice pleaded.

A content smile crept on her face, happy to see Emily assume a brave attitude, even if she was shy about it. Joyce wasn’t ever looking for perfection from her, because she’d be more than happy to make up the difference. As long as Emily told her it was okay she’d be happy to help.

“Let’s get a move on then, hm?”

With the bag over Emily’s shoulder the pair crossed the street and walked up to the door. Emily hadn’t bothered ringing the room’s bell from the entrance. She tried the same entrance code both she and Jack knew, which struck her with a bitter taste when it worked. It was another sign of how Jack went about kicking her out so half-assedly. The lobby was as empty as always and the nostalgia Emily was already feeling was anything but happy. It was uncomfortable, to say the least.

“What floor is it?” Joyce asked, a finger already positioned to hit the elevator panel.

“The fourth.” Emily kept her words brief. The more she talked the more she felt like she’d crumble. The distance between she and her ex was becoming unbearable as miles turned to

hundreds of yards, to hundreds of feet. It was then for the first time Emily received a friendly arm around the shoulder without blushing. She knew she needed comfort.

Wordlessly, Emily walked down the hall, the same one with the mediocre flooring and decently-painted walls. Room 403 was still missing the zero symbol that should have been screwed into the wall between four and three. It was empty, much like when Jack snatched the zero away from her. It was a painful reminder she had hoped to forget about, but this sort of ‘therapy’ only prodded it further.

Bob was still blasting his rock music from the next door over, without any regard for the complaints he’d get the night before. Every night she’d be banging on his wall, getting him to try and turn it down. Peaceful negotiations broke down about a week after they started, seeing as they were getting nowhere. Clearly it didn’t bother Jack though, because hearing the music now was enough to speak for itself.

Room 408. This was it.

Joyce stayed silent, giving Emily every moment she could possibly ever need. Time could go on for centuries and they wouldn’t have needed to leave this spot. This moment wasn’t essential to Emily in any way to encourage her play with Joyce. No, this was something she needed to overcome as a person. Closure.

Drawing out her hand and letting it freeze for a few moments, Emily rapped her knuckles on the wooden door, with a force that did not convey anger but a forced neutral response.

“One second!” An old voice called from the other end. Emily could almost feel her ears flinch from hearing him. The voicemail was all she could think of now; how he suddenly discarded her and left her like a piece of trash. She could only think of all the things that made her hate him.

With the sliding of a chain and click of a lock, the door swung open to reveal the womanly pair to the lazed Jack, who was in a loose t-shirt and shorts. The sight didn’t register surprise on his face until a few moments later, reading the unpleasant expression on his Ex’s face, and the neutral expression from Joyce who was a complete stranger to him.

“Ah...Emily...” Jack rubbed the side of his hair awkwardly. He hadn’t been expecting to see her so soon. Or at all, for that matter...”I take it you’re here for your stuff?”

“Yeah. I am.” She tried to keep herself reserved.

“Er, right.” The awkward atmosphere was potent. Thick and heavy. He was still trying to piece together who the woman with her was. Out of all Emily’s friends he’d never seen this one, who had such a beautiful face and figure hiding behind her jacket...How could he possibly forget someone as stunning as this? He set aside his turning gears to leave some space in the doorway. “Come in...”

Emily didn’t wait for any more confirmation, whilst Jack and Joyce exchanged very brief but formal greetings.

“Want me to come with you?” Joyce asked behind Emily, whose turquoise Converse were already moving with a purpose and destination in mind. Jack could only listen and watch in awe. Here his ex was, picking up the rest of her life while a complete and utter goddess to his eyes and ears seductively walked around his apartment. Her mere presence suddenly made him self-conscious of his laid-back attire, just as much as the state of the apartment. It was relatively clean, but the bobs and bits left about became that much more apparent.

“Yes please,” Emily maintained her rigid front, not wanting to give Jack any sign of despair or defeat. Weakness was not an option.

“We shouldn’t be too long,” Joyce looked back at Jack. “Please don’t mind us.”

Damn! She was even polite! Had Emily told her what happened between them? Even he knew it wasn’t the best way to let someone go, but it still didn’t change the fact he’d done it in the way that he did.. In a mere week his ex already seemed to have found her footing again. It was off-putting...

Emily walked into the room she used to share with Jack. The covers had been poorly drawn up the bed, and the pillows lacked uniformity. Jack never was big on picking up after himself, and to remember a note like that made Emily hate herself more for still being so invested. Opening the closet, she could see her clothes looked to be untouched. A few things she thought to find though were actually missing. She was too steamed to actually ask about them though.

The atmosphere from being in this place was now suffocating; a place she used to be able to call home. How different it felt now. Before she could lounge anywhere she wanted around here without needing anyone’s permission, but she felt like a stranger now. She didn’t think a breakup could affect her like this, and it only made her want to sever her ties with this place even more.

Without even bothering to fold, she kept shoving outfit after outfit into the bag, deviating more and more from the actual reason for why she came here. She didn’t even need to speak to Jack to

become so heated! It was a good thing Joyce came; she didn't know if she'd be able to keep her cool.

"You know if you fold them beforehand we won't have to when we get home," Joyce butted in, gently taking Emily's frustrated arm. Emily stopped looking at the rapidly changing fabrics and colors to look at Joyce. It was a foolish thing to think that she could hide her tears from her.

Emily tried to be as silent as possible, so as not to alert a nosy third party. Her hands clenched the material of Joyce's jacket, who was happy to be a crutch for her little girl.

"Would you be able to give us a moment, please?" Joyce turned her head back on the only male in the apartment, who couldn't help but find himself watching. Her voice carried a tone that was polite, but underlined with the sentiment that she didn't appreciate onlookers.

"Right! Erm...sorry." Jack shuffled out of view, trying to plant himself in the nearby kitchen. His mind was racing with fascination as his mind was occupied with the sudden stranger. *Home?* Was Emily living with this woman? The more he thought about how she looked, the more otherworldly she seemed. Something about her screamed high class, yet to see her kind words spoken to another was so...attractive. He didn't even consider his own shamelessness for ogling at one of Emily's friends; the person he dumped. Emily was wearing clothes he'd never seen her in either. Did she get them for her? What was her name? Jack was dying to know.

Joyce helped resume the packing process in a much more neat fashion. She kept comments to herself from seeing all her various outfits, trying to make the process as streamlined as possible. She moved over to the underwear drawer to get those articles of clothing, passively noticing the inferior materials and softness they had compared to the ones she bought Emily. Not in a manner as if she ridiculed Emily's choice in clothes or financial ability, no. Just that she was that much more happy to be able to do for Emily. She'd have to buy her more underwear of the same quality...

"There's still your bathroom stuff if you want it." Jack suddenly appeared again, trying to inject himself into the conversation despite it not being his place.

"I'm fine." Emily blankly said. She didn't want any more reminders of this place than she needed, and the thought of having to be here any longer just to sort through frivolous things sounded too stressful.

The packing continued for about ten more minutes until there was nothing left to take, or anything Emily wanted, at least.

“All done?” Joyce asked, clasping her hands together.

“Mhm...” Emily nodded with sorrowful feelings. They were by no means aimed at Joyce, but Emily couldn’t feel the need to keep her emotions in check at the moment. Joyce understood well enough though and zipped the duffel bag closed.

“We’ll be leaving now.” Joyce called to Jack as the pair briskly moved to the door. He was trying to make himself look busy on his phone from the kitchen.

“Oh um, okay.” Jack stiffly spoke. “And, uh, Emily,” He continued, catching her attention. “You...you look good.”

Why...why did he have to say that? Emily could feel her face contort, brows furrow and anger seethe in between her teeth. Without a word or second glance she opened the door and broke out into a near-stomp down the hall. She wanted to scream from hearing those words. *Kindness*. Kindness from someone who had been such an ass, kicked her to the curb, and he got to play it off like it was nothing? *No, no, no!* It doesn’t get to work like that! And as she burned with rage, she didn’t even realize it herself that tears were rolling down her cheeks. As if somewhere from a sixth sense she had known, Emily turned and buried her face into the person that was already waiting for her and she hugged dearly.

“Why...” she mumbled through her sobs as she pressed on the coat. “Why! Why does he get to be like that? Why does it only hurt *ME* so much?!” Emily cried, standing in the middle of a place that had lost its familiar feeling. The only thing that kept her from beating her fists into the cushion was that the cushion was Joyce, and she could never harm someone as generous as her.

Joyce couldn’t give her any words, as even she ached for the poor Emily. The only effective consolation she could offer was the physical contact she was already giving. Emily hugged tight and never wanted to let go. It was the only thing that prevented a meltdown she’d put off for so long.

How could a year of her life have gone to waste? To be as if she were the only person who cared?! Not even the one she’d spent it with even gave a damn! WHY? Why did only her heart have to be so vulnerable like this? Jack’s words were cruel, even if he hadn’t meant it to be that way. Regardless, Emily still held it against him. Even when the flame between them was put out, the embers that remained were still scorching..

“Let’s head on back to the car,” Joyce comforted, still holding Emily close. “You can unwind once you sit down.” Emily could feel the suggestions already loosen the tension in her muscles. She sniffled and nodded as they kept moving forward, unable to leave the apartment unscathed, but it would have been a lie if either of them had expected things to go smoothly.

“Ah...I forgot my phone....” Emily could feel herself wanting to cry again in the elevator. She had checked something on her phone and left it on the nightstand...But everything inside of her wanted nothing to do with the place again. It was an important piece though, and Joyce had just gotten it for her...She was such a failure.

“Here, go unlock the car.” Joyce balled the keys in her hand. “I’ll go and get it for you,” she patted her back. “Where did you leave it?”

“On the nightstand...in the room. I’m sorry, really. I didn’t mean to, I was just...”

“Stop dwelling on the little stuff.” Joyce spoke in a simple voice. “I’ll be back to make you go back to your bubbly self, okay?” Emily was the only one to step off the elevator and back into the lobby. She was already feeling better to get some distance and happy encouragement.

“Okay...” Emily finally looked Joyce in the eyes with a puffy-eyed smile, until the metal doors closed again between them. Joyce then sighed, as the metal box moved back up. She wasn’t exactly keen on going back here either, since if what Emily had said to be true, then Jack seriously was taking their breakup far too lightly. To so effortlessly drop her fragile Emily almost openly irked her a little. For Emily’s sake though she’d keep up appearances in front of this guy for a little longer though.

Jack had been a little sad; not to see Emily go, but the person with her. Maybe a little for Emily, but certainly more the stranger. Had they been on different terms, Jack could almost imagine himself even trying to get closer to that enchantress...If only. His fantasies were interrupted though by the knock on the door again. Were they back? They couldn’t be! With a misplaced sense of urgency he opened the door once again, only to see the magnificent Joyce standing in the doorway.

“Oh! Hi again!” Jack was caught by her beauty yet again; a small smile on his face.

“Hi,” Joyce didn’t reciprocate the fascination. “Emily forgot her phone. If you don’t mind, I could just...?”

“Of course! Get whatever you need.” Jack repeated the same motion as he did last time. This had to be a second chance! Even Emily wasn’t here now. It was a sign! “Uh, hey...I’m Jack by the way. Emily probably told you already...” Her blank expression directed toward him insinuated they probably weren’t the best of words...”And...you are?” He shamelessly pushed on with the kind of carelessness Joyce had only liked to see in Emily. His was of a much more malicious and beginnings of a lechery kind... With no regard to the affiliation she had with his ex, his disregard for this was downright stupid, or that much more cruel to move ahead despite knowing this.

“Joyce. Nice to meet you.” Joyce kept moving. She walked into the bedroom as they had left it ten minutes earlier. Forgetting Emily’s instructions for a brief moment, she decided to check the room at random and pulled back the covers for whatever reason. Apart from the sheets being tussled, there was something else Joyce’s eyes couldn’t mistake.

At first glance, the feelings that flooded her mind weren’t for her total loss of respect for Jack, nor to the connection he was trying to form with her. They were devoid of personal feelings for herself, or Jack. It was only for Emily, as a sudden sense of relief struck her from realizing Emily never saw what was underneath the covers. Nonchalantly, a pink thong lay discarded on the bed as if it were nobody’s business. To the cheap decor in the house it also added to the theme of a bachelor; of someone who didn’t know the first thing about commitment.

She tried not to scoff, as her concern for Emily was placed to the side, and the afterthoughts of Jack and her sudden disdain for him came to her forefront and in full swing. Grabbing the phone off the nightstand, she didn’t want to spend a moment longer in there. Someone much more important was waiting for her.

“Oh um hey, wait a sec...!” Jack couldn’t process that the moment they had together was ending faster than he thought. Her hand was already going for the knob and he hadn’t taken the chance yet to establish anything.

“Jack,” Joyce maintained her calm demeanor, but it was a weak disguise for the true annoyance she felt underneath. “I can’t blame Emily for wanting to love you, and she seemed like she really did.” She was becoming too invested in a matter that didn’t concern her, so why was she so pissed off?

“People love and want to *be* loved. There’s nothing wrong with that.” She wasn’t even sure if these words were getting through to Jack, but recent actions and sights left Joyce far too annoyed to not say something. “But to betray that love, that trust, Emily, and to trample over it so easily and discard it? That makes you complete and utter scum. There’s a way of handling things that you seemed to have completely disregarded.” Her rage was feeding into a cycle that she knew

she had to put to rest. The man who tried to look complacent was killing her! His seeming lack of remorse was the cherry on top of the malice she felt towards him.

“Joyce, but...” Jack tried to find the right words--anything to preserve the mood between them. There had to be something he could say, something he could do! Maybe-

The door slammed shut, and Joyce was gone. The goddess he let get away. Emily was the last thing he could think about now; not when a prize as shiny as her just slipped away.

“Damn...” He spat out to no one. He sighed as he looked over to the wall. Bob’s music was starting to get loud again...

From Jack’s place to the car, the walk was thankfully enough for Joyce to let off the rest of her steam. She couldn’t help but feel a little heated back there, so it was nice when the cool air outside enveloped her. Just across the street, she could see Emily’s face through the tinted windshield, reminding her of what she just witnessed. Emily didn’t need to know what was up there, did she? It was already clear enough how much of an ass Jack was, so there was no reason to make Emily feel even worse. At least not for a bit. It’d be better if they just put this to the side and focus on getting home. Then a little detour popped into Joyce’s mind.

“Sorry I took so long,” Joyce placed the phone in Emily’s hand, who had been quiet. “Someone tied up the elevator.”

“It’s fine. I just want to get away from here...” She was already feeling sad again just from looking at the building. “I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

“Okay,” She agreed. “But you should know not everyone could have done what you did, you know. Revisiting something like that? I’ll let it go from here, but you should be proud.” She’d been as positive and reinforcing like when she’d baby Emily, only now it was much more geared towards Emily as an individual and independent; much less her as a mother signing songs of praise.

Cruising down the road, a few seconds went by when Emily finally came to and understood they were taking a different route.

“Hey,” She adjusted her somewhat reclined position. “Where are you taking us?”

Intentionally in a suspicious voice, Joyce spoke. “Nooooowhere...”

“I’m not really in the mood to do anything Joyce,” Emily apologized, already finding a new thing to be sad about. She didn’t *want* to be a buzzkill, but wasn’t feeling up to anything either. They had work tomorrow.

“That’s okay, neither am I.” Joyce agreed. She kept driving.

“Then where are you taking us?” Emily was already being drawn into one of Joyce’s secret plans; an adventure she’d find herself in before she even realized it.

“We need to make a little stop before we go home. I just remembered I needed something.”

So it was an errand? Joyce kept her guessing whenever she asked, the mood being lightened with each and every incorrect answer.

“Pencils?” Joyce started to laugh. “Why would we need pencils? At this time of night?” It wasn’t a laugh of ridicule, but fun amusement at her determination.

“I don’t know...” Emily sheepishly complained. “You won’t tell me where we’re going!”

“Alright, alright. I’ll give you a hint.” Joyce paused, trying to think of one. One came to her mind though when she suddenly spoke. “It involves dairy.”

Dairy?

“So you need to pick up milk?”

“Sort of,” Joyce toyed with how to answer the question. “You’re getting warmer.” The sudden irony in her words cracked another grin.

“...Ice cream?”

“Hot! Red hot!” Joyce started with a few sizzling noises.

“Milk...ice cream...milkshakes?”

“Bingo!” Joyce cheered as they parked near the sidewalk. On Emily’s side there was a large display for a place called Shake Stop. She’d heard of the place before, but the prices were a bit

high for dairy treats..."So do you know what you're getting?" Joyce asked, already expecting the girl to have a flavor in mind.

"Ah, well I mean I've never been here before," She admitted. "I'm not so sure I'm in the mood for a shake though...Thanks for trying to cheer me up." Emily had figured out Joyce's plan, and she was appreciative, but wasn't willing.

"Suit yourself," Joyce shrugged. "At least walk in with me, won't you?" Joyce kept coaxing until Emily agreed, both of them stepping out and rushing between sanctuaries, caught in the wild winds during their short trek.

"Brrrr!" Joyce chilled as she hugged Emily all over inside. A little shocked, Emily wobbled just a little from the sudden contact. "I need to keep you around more often, you always seem to warm me up!" Joyce casually flirted.

No one was in line and there were a few groups already seated down with their own drinks. Joyce took the lead with Emily in tow as they approached the wide board of orders. "You don't have any allergies, right?" Joyce turned her face back to Emily expectantly.

"No, but like I said I'm fine." Emily tried to remain resolute. Looking around though, some of the smoothies and milkshakes did look good...

"Hi, can I help you two tonight?" The attendant asked from behind the counter, prompting Emily and Joyce to come forward.

"Hi, I'll take a large peanut butter and oreo milkshake please," Joyce answered, then turned back to Emily. "And what do you want?"

Emily looked at Joyce with the slightest bit of annoyance; the kind that still meant she very much liked Joyce, but was bothered with how she couldn't take 'no' for an answer. It was that generosity of hers again. Her adamant and commanding side always gave her such a tingly feeling though...

The silence must have been too long for Joyce though, because she spoke again. "You can order something if you want, *or*, I can order something for you?" She had a playfully evil grin, showing off her pearly whites.

"Banana, then." Emily answered. "A banana smoothie please."

“Just banana?” The worker read back to her. He was just doing his job, but it somehow felt as if he were questioning her imagination for flavor. Joyce too, considering her next action.

“With strawberries, please. And make that a large as well.” Joyce added. “Try and be a *little* more adventurous.” Joyce playfully chastised Emily, who was trying her best to not look spoiled at this moment.

“And will that be everything?”

“Yes please,” Emily, surprisingly, answered. She didn’t want Joyce to try and buy a third drink, lest she have asked herself or simply felt like it.

“Ookay...” He started as he began to punch numbers into the cash register. “\$9.75 please.”

\$9.75?! For two drinks? That was outrageous! Emily was the only one struck in awe though as Joyce casually swiped her card into the machine.

“They should be ready in a few minutes,” The worker said as he handed Joyce a receipt and pierced the duplicate one on a spike of already stacked clones. He carried what was probably the order slip over to his coworker and they made haste in getting to work.

“You didn’t have to answer for me, you know.” Joyce joked while they waited.

“I could say the same to you.” Emily found herself being swept into the game. “For all I know, you could have gotten four more shakes if I didn’t stop you!”

She chuckled hearing such unusual words from the typically reserved girl, especially when it came to money. “Is that what I am to you? A maniac that likes to spend money?” Joyce pulled Emily in for another hug, without any real regard for how it looked to others.

“Maybe...” Emily kept the joke running, but could feel the smallest seeds of truth in her mind. In no way at all did it affect how good of a person Joyce was, though.

“Thanks for the wait, here’s your order.” The worker interrupted their joyful banter and set their drinks on the counter, both of which already had a straw in it.

“Thank you very much, have a good night.” Joyce slipped a few bills into the tip jar, grabbing their cups and handing the banana one to Emily.

It was awfully cold, so much so that Emily used her sleeve almost like a glove around her hand then picked up the drink again. It alleviated some of the direct cold to her skin, but even she was starting to get a bit thirsty for a delicious treat now.

“Do you want to have them here or at home?” Joyce offered, finally giving her a choice.

“Home, please.” Emily answered, already sucking from the straw. It was pure, liquidized fruit that maintained all its sweet and savory flavor! She had been reluctant with a large at first, but at the pace she was going now, she couldn’t help but be thankful for Joyce to plan ahead like this.

“It’s good, I take it?” Joyce read her partner like an open book. She took a sip of her own milkshake and was equally as satisfied. Relative to other places the prices for here *were* high, but in Joyce’s position a few dollars made no real difference in the grand scheme. For someone as hardworking as her, she’d at least earned this much to treat herself and others, right?

Emily could only nod her head, with a mouth occupied by a straw. She took the lead in going back outside and to the car, almost ready to hop from foot to foot from the wind.

They each took their own breath of relief when they were back inside the heated and warm car. Having accomplished their original goal and getting themselves a reward to top it off, they turned back on the path home.

“Thanks, Joyce...” Emily suddenly changed the mood with a heavier topic. “I know I said earlier I wasn’t in the mood, and Jack had me pretty banged up. Yet you still insisted on doing this for me.” At a set of lights they could both get a good look at each other. “Thank you.”

Those rare moments Joyce could see Emily with such an unwavering resolve in her eyes made her feel strange; to go from someone who could be so bashful to a fully fledged adult. It made Joyce happy to see her in either form, particularly the former, but as a person Emily was astonishingly amazing.

“You’re very welcome, Emily. I’m just glad you’re happy now. Sad feelings don’t suit you, you know.”

The last remark had suddenly killed the flare in Emily, as she was back to her squishy self, but this didn’t make Joyce think any less of her; relishing in these moments all the more.

“If you want to thank me, keep at least some of your smoothie in the cup, please! I want to try it when we get back!” Joyce with her free hand switched Emily’s drink out for her own, which had

still been mostly untouched. “Keep yourself busy with that one.” There wasn’t much left to the drive, and Joyce was curious to taste hers as well.

Giggling over Joyce’s almost serious reaction to the smoothie crisis, she started to experience the taste of oreo and peanut butter, which tasted just as good.

Thursday passed and so came Friday. Joyce got off early and came home to an empty apartment to do officework, without anything else to really do other than marvel at her many purchases for Emily. Things were coming together, but they weren’t completely ready yet...The decisive moment would be on the special date marked on her calendar. After meeting with many people and getting many jobs and items delivered and done, it would all be ready *then*.

Now that she had grown used to it, her downtime without Emily had become...dreadfully boring. It wasn’t a lie when she said Emily brought some sort of life to the house. Not even her fantasizing could keep her occupied anymore. This weekend would be fun, but *next* week it would be thousands of times better! She’d have to be her usual self and focus on the present rather than what would come in the future. If not, Emily might start getting suspicious...Oh, it was so difficult keeping secrets from her! But! It was for the greater good. It would be worth it; every second of the painful wait.

A few more hours went by, and then a few more. It was already 6 and Joyce was starting to get concerned. She was never this late! What was wrong? Could she be late? Was she hurt? The countless possibilities Joyce racked in her brain were troubling and annoying. Whatever forces were at work here, they were severely cutting into her Emmy-time!

While Joyce slowly descended into madness, the sound of a door opening and closing could be heard. Was it Emily?

“Unbelievable...” Joyce could hear a voice scoff around the corner, a set of shoes slipping off.

“Emil-?” Joyce poked her head around the corner, asking for the girl as she saw who came in. It was certainly Emily, but it wasn’t at the same time. Almost like a doppelganger, this one looked certainly more exhausted, with bags underneath her eyes and her sluggish posture. Had she only known what kind of ecstasy she had felt from taking off her shoes, Joyce herself would be feeling the same kind of relief. But at this point Emily looked as if she were running on fumes; her last leg.

“What happened?” Joyce rushed to her with concern. She’d never seen Emily once like this.

“They worked us overtime today,” Emily wiped her eyes, trying to keep herself alert. “Because they had to close down my department after today for review and possible renovation. In other words I’m out of work next week until further notice. Therefore we worked to the bone so we could get as much done as possible today.” Emily sighed.

“Out of work? So you’re not working next week? Are they paying you?”

Emily, who was somewhat satisfied with the turnout to that question replied, “We’re on paid leave, but slightly less than our working salaries,” she explained. “In other words, I guess I’m on vacation?” Even Emily started to smile then when past the fatigue she could recognize her situation.

“Really? That’s great!” Joyce gave her a celebratory hug. “Here’s to your time off!” She planted a kiss on Emily’s cheek, who became warm on contact. The lines between them were slowly blurring, based on what was constituted as mommy-affection and Joyce-affection. They were both okay with it though, as it only meant they could grow closer.

“Enjoy your time off, then! I’ll get started on dinner soon. I just need to check a few emails.” Joyce announced while she stood back up, already walking back to her office.

“Ah...wait!” Emily suddenly found herself raising her voice, keeping it to almost a troubled whisper now. She couldn’t look Joyce in the eyes when she said it, so she found herself looking from left to right. “Didn’t you say that we were gonna....you know?”

Already from her cluttered expressions Joyce knew exactly what she meant, but chose not to act on it yet.

““You know’ ...what?” Joyce came back closer to Emily, who was standing now.

Emily knew exactly what kind of games Joyce was playing, who pretended to play dumb.

“Stop teasing me, Joyce. You....know what I mean....” The red-faced tomato whined.

“You’re gonna have to tell me what you want my itty-bitty girl if I’m supposed to understand!” Joyce booped her on the nose, getting even closer. “Tell me, what do you want?”

Emily looked at Joyce, almost annoyed, who was making her be honest with herself and lay it out in the open. Then again, that's what being shameless was all about...Joyce's past words echoed in her mind...*where shame and embarrassment weren't allowed.*

"I...want..." Emily managed the first two words, already feeling both emotionally and physically tolled from those alone.

"Mhm?" Joyce kept her ignorant act going, happy to see Emily was finally demonstrating her growth by asking to be retrieved from it, in a weird way.

"You to..." Her mind raced and her cheeks could have very well been on fire at this point. Had you told her she'd be saying these very words over a week ago, she'd never have believed them!

"B-ba..." This hurdle was the toughest to cross, but why? It was just a simple word! Just say it!

Joyce waited patiently but was almost on the edge of her metaphorical seat. It was the word she needed to hear, the one they both wanted to hear! With this, it would become definitively clear that Emily wasn't just fulfilling Joyce's desires anymore; no...This was a sign of mutual enjoyment! Joyce's heart fluttered at the sweet and innocent thought!

"B-ba...by me..." The phrase felt foreign in her own tongue. Something that defied her very nature came from her set of lungs and she actually announced it to someone else. But it wasn't just someone else, it was Joyce.

"You want me to baby you?" Her voice came back as one of confirmation and neither disbelief or ridicule. "Is that what you want, Emily?"

"Y-yes..." No longer was it Joyce asking Emily to go along with this, but instead it was the exact opposite! Oh how the tables had been turned. Who would have thought it was the baby asking the mother for special treatment?

"Then let me hear you say it again. Loud and clear this time Emily." Emily might have thought it as cruel, but now Emily finally had a chance to get used to being honest with such embarrassing things. Something that could become commonplace would no longer be strange to talk about after all.

"I...want you to b-baby me." Emily rushed the words out of her mouth faster this time, slightly louder. "There....I said it." She still couldn't make eye contact with Joyce, but this was more than enough.

“That was perfect,” Joyce smiled with her loving gaze. “You did very well, *Emmy*.”

There it was, that special name Joyce had for her whenever it was their intimate play. The two-syllable word that could make Emily puddle and simply melt in Joyce’s hand. And she was ecstatic when it happened. It returned her to a mindset that was becoming familiar and she was well-acquainted with. Joyce was no longer Joyce. She was...she was...mommy.

“Now,” her soft voice began, already slipping a finger into the waistband of Emily’s business skirt. She pulled it back ever so slightly to give Joyce an angled view at the underwear she was wearing underneath, causing Emily to look away once more, but offered no resistance.

“I think it’s time we got you in something a bit more age-appropriate? What do you think?” The motherly Joyce suggested, who was already slipping the zipper down on her skirt.

This was it. The weekend the both of them had been waiting for. Emily could only beam with a bashful excitement as Joyce talked to her more and more in such a way where she had full control and held all the cards. All Emily needed to do was enjoy herself.

Emily didn’t respond, but her request to do this only moments ago carried enough of an answer. Here she was, standing in front of the entrance, while Joyce slid off her skirt and she stepped out of it willingly. After being stark naked in Joyce’s embrace, suddenly something like this didn’t bother her as much anymore. If she could be around Joyce in just a shirt and diaper, what did a simple pair of panties mean to her? She could almost laugh at her own rapid change in mindset. All thanks to Joyce.

All that she was in now was a blouse, socks, and her blue underwear. A pair Joyce had bought her. Everything she was wearing, who she was, all in this moment, belonged to Joyce. She wanted to belong to her.

“Now how about we change you into something *much* softer? Hm? Doesn’t that sound nice?”

Emily shuffled her feet as she quietly nodded; feeling her now exposed thighs start to warm from the apartment.

“Then let’s get a-move on. I’m sure you’re itching to get out of those panties, and then it’ll be straight to naptime for you missy.”

“W-what do you mean? I just got back?” Emily partly complained. She didn’t want to have to go down as soon as they started their baby time...

“And that’s *exactly* why, Emmy.” Joyce hoisted the half-naked girl into the air, moving to her room. She lowered her voice closer to her ear, as if she were already trying to communicate with someone tired and sleepy. “You’ve had a *busy* day, which is why we need to get you all *fresh* and *restored*.” She knew how to put emphasis on all the right words. “That way we can have *lots* more fun and cuddle time when you’re awake. Make sense?”

“Mhm...” Emily was already finding Joyce’s shoulder pretty comfortable. She knew Joyce was right about the tired part, already feeling sleepy given the position to relax. But what made her heart race was that there was one last step before she could take a nap. Something essential to this entire process.

“Maybe if you can go down for about forty minutes mommy can have some delicious food ready for when you wake up. Do you think you could be my big helper and rest up for me?”

It was silly to think sleeping was somehow beneficial to Joyce, but Emily was becoming more and more prone to giving in to the mommy-logic. Her realized fatigue was another deterrent to combat it as well, not that she wanted to in the first place.

“Okay...” Emily yawned. She was already laid back on the bed.

“Such a good helper!” Joyce cooed as she already fished out her medical diaper. The days for these were numbered, and that was something to appreciate. She couldn’t wait to see the surprised, bashful, and secretly excited expressions on Emily’s face once her new diapers came. These would have to do for the time being though.

Emily was just ready to pass out as soon as she could feel her bottom lift and press into a new cushion, a feeling and sensation that wasn’t so foreign to her anymore. The sweet smells of powder came next as the light sprinkles lightly tapped her crotch area. There was a cool feeling from the shroud on her lower half, but it felt good in a way. The only thing that could stir her was when Joyce had taken the next step to rub some into her backside, but her former embarrassed protests were now just blushes and slight shifts. With the final tape, Emily could register a snug feeling around her waist and she was already fading in and out of reality.

“Welcome to the first day of your vacation, Emmy.” Joyce pecked Emily on the forehead. She helped her get under the covers. “Now you have a nice, good rest for me, okay? We’ll have lots of time to be together, so don’t feel any rush to finish your nap, alright?”

Incapable of making coherent responses at this point, Emily made a mumble that was at best a yes and at worst a sleepy murmur. She didn't actually need Joyce to tell her to get a good rest. She was more than capable of that herself. How easily Emily could fall into the flow of things now though was nothing short of magical to Joyce. They were reaching a point where this was mutually fulfilling, and Joyce at the thought shed a few tears of joy, to know that she wasn't the only one anymore.

With one last thankful look at Emily, who had gone out like a light, she inched the door to a near-close as she switched gears to the new task at hand, now that she was done putting her baby girl to bed. Checking the time, she reasoned she could finish painting and get dinner started if she made good with her time. Nap after nap, it was becoming easier to read Emily, which made the establishment of a routine between a mother and her baby that much more real.

Hopefully the brushes hadn't dried too much?